

THE CURRENT OF WAR

by the same author

HISTORY

Through the Fog of War
The War in Outline, 1914-18
A History of the World War, 1914-18
The Ghost of Napoleon
The Decisive Wars of History

BIOGRAPHY

'T. E. Lawrence'—*in Arabia and After*
Sherman
Foch
Scipio Africanus
Reputations
Great Captains Unveiled

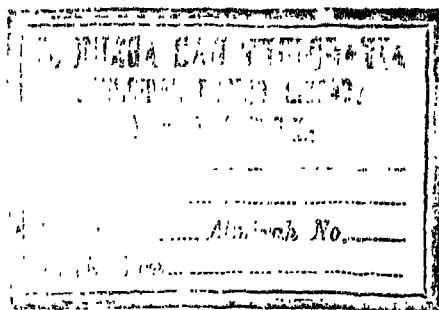
MILITARY SCIENCE

Dynamic Defence
The Defence of Britain
Europe in Arms
The British Way in Warfare
When Britain Goes to War
The Future of Infantry
The Remaking of Modern Armies
Paris, or The Future of War
The Science of Infantry Tactics
and certain of the General Staff manuals

THE CURRENT OF WAR

by

LIDDELL HART



SECOND IMPRESSION

HUTCHINSON & CO. (Publishers) LTD.
LONDON AND MELBOURNE

Made and Printed in Great Britain at
The Mayflower Press, Plymouth. William Brendon & Son, Ltd.

TO
DOROTHY AND LEONARD ELMHIRST
in admiration of their far-seeing experiment in a
more constructive sphere

Preface

THREE currents are combined in this volume. The current of "war in progress"—as seen when moving with it, and when looking back from the next bend in the stream; the current of pre-war policy, and the current of mechanized mobility—which together have determined the course of the war up to date.

It is too early to start writing the history of the war. That must wait until much fuller evidence is available; indeed, the exploration of the history of the last war was still incomplete when this war came. (There is a danger of distorting history when a retrospective narrative and definitive judgment are attempted close in the wake of events—as anyone may see by looking up the "serial" histories that were written during the years 1914-1918.) In the meantime, a more illuminating picture may be provided by reproducing the successive impressions formed at each significant moment of the war, supplemented by a running commentary in the light of facts that have since become known.

One of the most common sayings is that it is easy to be wise after the event. In reality, wisdom after the event is almost as uncommon as common sense—aptly described as "the rarest of all the senses." For the study of history, especially in regard to war, only too painfully bears out the truth of the reflection—"We learn from history that we do not learn from history."

In pursuing the study of history at the same time as that of current affairs I was led to the conclusion that the most likely way of achieving a scientific forecast of the trend of

Preface

developments lay in the application of what might be called philosophical geometry—to get a projection of the experience of the past through the present pointing to the future. Such a method seemed to offer the best chance of being wise before the event. This book may serve to show the application of the method over a period of some twenty years, and enable the reader to follow the way it worked out.

Contents

	Preface	PAGE 7
	PART I: THE NEW HORIZON	
CHAPTER	I. The Next Great War. (A 1922 view.)	15
	II. A "New Model" Army. (1922.)	42
	III. Aiming at the Moral Objective	53
	PART II: THE SHADOW OF COMING EVENTS	
	IV. The Army of a Nightmare. (The British Army in 1926.)	69
	V. The French Army. (A criticism, a fore- cast, and a suggestion, in 1926.)	83
	VI. The New British Doctrine of Mechanized War. (1929.)	92
	VII. The Grave Deficiencies of the Army. (A Warning in 1933.)	108
	VIII. Britain is in Danger. (On the threshold of 1939.)	126
	PART III: LIGHTNING OVER POLAND (Two confidential estimates of the situation, and two unpublished articles)	
	Introduction	137
	IX. The Prospect in a War over Poland. (August 27, 1939.)	142

Contents

CHAPTER		PAGE
X.	The Need for a New Technique. (September 9, 1939.)	151
XI.	Facing the Problem. (September 28, 1939.)	158
XII.	The Best Guarantee against Aggression. (March 19, 1940.)	164

PART IV : THE LULL BEFORE THE STORM

XIII.	Changing the War Minister	171
XIV.	Analysis of the War	180
XV.	Will the Cities be Bombed ?	195
XVI.	Is it Stalemate in the West ?	202
XVII.	The Psychological War	211
XVIII.	"Should We Go to the Assistance of the Finns ? "	220
XIX.	Can Finland Hold Out ?	227
XX.	Middle East War ?	236

PART V : THE STORM BREAKS—OVER SCANDINAVIA

XXI.	The Invasion of Norway	247
XXII.	The Allied Counter-Invasion	255
XXIII.	An Awkward Balance	270
XXIV.	The Allied Withdrawal	285

PART VI : THE STORM MOVES WEST

XXV.	The Break-In	299
XXVI.	The Break-Through	362
XXVII.	The Knock-Out—of France	340
XXVIII.	The Close-quarter Threat to Britain	359

Contents

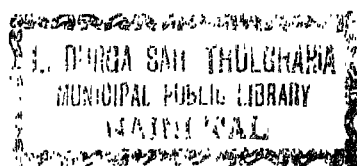
PART VII : THE WAR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXIX.	The Threat to Egypt	369
XXX.	Before the Curtain Rises	372
XXXI.	The Invasion of Greece	378
XXXII.	A Vital Turn in the War	383
XXXIII.	The Greek Counter-Offensive	391

PART VIII : EPILOGUE AND PROLOGUE

XXXIV.	“ Can We Take the Offensive in 1941 ? ”	399
--------	---	-----

PART I
THE NEW HORIZON



CHAPTER I

THE NEXT GREAT WAR

(A 1922 VIEW)

This was written for the Gold Medal (Military) Essay competition of the Royal United Service Institution in 1922. The subject set that year was—"Discuss the manner in which scientific inventions and science in general may affect, both strategically and tactically, the next great European war in which the British Empire may be engaged. Indicate the organization and training required to secure the view which you may have formed as regards the Imperial military forces."

The Referees were Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff in the last war ; Lieut.-General Sir Noel Birch, who had been Chief Artillery Adviser in France, and was subsequently Master-General of the Ordnance from 1923 to 1927, thus being responsible for developing the weapons of the British Army ; and Colonel O. H. L. Nicholson, the official representative of the War Office on the Council of the R.U.S.I.

Each of the essays submitted had to bear a motto instead of the author's name, in order to preserve anonymity until the Referees had delivered their judgment. The motto I chose for mine was the proverb : "Oil and truth will get uppermost at last"—implying that the superiority of mechanized forces over horse and foot was bound to be recognized sooner or later.

The essay did not gain a "place" among those selected by the Referees for a prize. It was, however, subsequently published in two parts (corresponding to the two questions contained in the subject)—the first part in the *Royal Engineers' Journal* for March, 1924, and the second part in the *Army Quarterly* for October, 1924.

In reading it in 1941, both its matter and its style may often seem open to criticism, but I would ask the charitable reader

The Current of War

to bear in mind that many of the technical developments that are familiar to-day were only embryonic or even purely speculative in 1922, and also that the author was twenty-six.

I. SCIENCE AND MILITARY STRATEGY

IN seeking to estimate the nature of the next great war, the course of our thought must inevitably reflect the progress of scientific invention. This development, whether for good or ill, is the supreme factor in modern civilization and is affecting the organization and mentality of national communities in such measure that it is only reasonable to suppose that the methods of war will reflect the ever-changing face of civil life.

The field of survey is so great that some bounds must be set on our researches for the purpose of the present study. Otherwise the problem appears almost too wide to tackle by any other method than the unrestricted imagination of a Jules Verne or an H. G. Wells.

This is the realm of possible scientific *discovery*. The future may undoubtedly bring to fruition the dreams of the sensational novelist—discovery in bacteriological and electrical science may lead to the wars of the future being waged by means of the germs, or the green, purple, and other rays, lurid in hue and effect, which form the properties of the prophet-novelist. But for a reasoned attempt to forecast the nature of the next war we cannot rely on suppositional discoveries of such a revolutionary character. Scientific *invention*, on the other hand, is concerned with the evolutionary development of the powers and properties which are already known to us.

The restriction of our survey within these limits appears justified historically by the precedents of past wars. History shows us that no entirely new weapon has radically affected the course of any war ; that the decisive weapon in a war

The Next Great War

has always been known, if but in a crude and undeveloped form, in the previous war.

It is foolish, also, to leave out of account the natural conservatism and prudence of military hierarchies or the parsimony of governments in regard to expenditure on military experiment in peace-time.

Let us, therefore, meditate on the probable lines of development of existing means of war instead of launching out into fantastic speculations which may prove but chimeras in the desert of future war—futile of advantage for practical military needs. Such a study divides itself into two natural realms—those of strategy, which is pre-eminently the science of communications, and tactics, which is the domain of weapons.

To put it more simply, strategy is concerned with the primary element, movement; and tactics with that of destruction—whether it be of the enemy's flesh or his will-power, the bodies of his troops or the nerves of his commanders and government.

A Means of Test for Military Truth

Having considered our potential opponents, we come to the kernel of our subject—the effect of scientific invention on our next major war, in regard both to strategy and tactics.

The common method in speculations on the future is to rely solely on imagination, swayed, possibly, by the personal prejudices and inherited ideas of the author. Such a method, though harmless in a Wellsian novel and all too common even in traditional military literature, is surely both vain and out of place in any study which aims at a serious military purpose and as a guide for rational thought.

We require some means by which we can test the various hypotheses and ideas which are advanced, so that we may co-ordinate them and classify them scientifically according to their several values.

In other words, the paramount need is for what may be

The Current of War

termed a compass or test-tube for military thought. It would surely appear that such a scientific means of test may be found if we can establish the fundamental principles of war—those which history shows us have been proved true and immutable by the experience of all past wars.

Since the end of the last war there has been a general realization that the absence of such a synthesis of basic principles was the root cause of the failure, common to all the warring nations, to adapt without perilous delay the prevailing methods to the changes in the conditions and weapons. As a result numerous attempts have been made to formulate the essential principles. The present author has been guilty of one such attempt.

That at least an approximation to truth has been obtained is shown by the fact that in essentials nearly all these syntheses agree, the differences being mainly of terminology or degree of comparative value assigned to the respective parts of the table.

In order to avoid, or at least minimize, controversy, it is proposed, for the purpose of this study, to take as our means of test the table of principles set forth in the official *Field Service Regulations* of the British Army. Eight principles are listed: the principle of the Objective,¹ for in every operation of war an objective must be determined and held in view throughout; the principle of the Offensive, which may be more simply termed "hitting"; the principle of Security,

¹ In later editions this was renamed, more correctly, the principle of the Object, or aim. For an objective is something concrete—such as a place of strategic importance—which you aim to gain as a means towards fulfilling your object, or purpose.

In my own later studies I came to see that the principle of flexibility, or elasticity, ought to be added to the list. And that this principle pointed to the practical need of having a variable aim and alternative objectives, rather than the single-minded aim and single objective which our military manuals, and military theory in general, had emphasized in recent generations. If the enemy can be sure of your point of aim he can concentrate his forces to guard it—and frustrate you. But if you take a line that offers, and threatens, alternative objectives you distract his mind and forces. In any problem where an opposing force exists, and cannot be regulated, one must foresee and provide for alternative courses. A plan must have branches, like a tree, if it is to bear fruit.

The Next Great War

or guarding ; the principle of Mobility, which is necessary both for successful hitting and guarding. The other four principles given are those of Surprise, Concentration, Economy of Force, and Co-operation.

Colonel Fuller has divided these principles into two groups, the first four being the "elemental" principles which are derived directly from the four main elements of war—mind, movement, weapons (i.e., destruction), and protection (i.e., maintenance against destruction). The other four he terms "accentuating" principles.

Elements :

Mind	Movement	Weapons	Protection
------	----------	---------	------------

Elementary Principles :

Objective	Mobility	Hitting	Security
-----------	----------	---------	----------

Accentuating Principles :

Surprise	Co-operation	Concentration	Economy of Force
----------	--------------	---------------	------------------

Having thus got a table of fundamental principles, we can proceed to test all new ideas on armament, movement, and organization by means of it, although with reference to the probable conditions under which the latter will have to function.

In order to keep our survey within limits, we shall deal only with the two concrete elements, movement (or communications) and weapons, which are the basic factors in strategy and tactics respectively.

Communications

As strategy precedes tactics in chronological order, let us first deal with the subject of communications and the effect on them of scientific inventions. Movement—a simpler word for communications—is of three categories : by land, sea, and air. These main categories may again be sub-divided—land-movement into track (road and rail), and trackless ;

The Current of War

sea-movement into surface and submarine ; air-movement into heavier and lighter than air.

As they are to-day, what are the relative advantages of each? Let us examine these three physical elements and apply the test of our synthesis—for the sake of “economy of space” only mentioning those principles which are relative to the points under consideration. From the point of view of *mobility*, air is easily first, land (rail) second, sea third, and land (road) fourth. For *surprise* movement, sea was first and land second, whether by rail or road—before the introduction of aerial observation. Now, so far, at any rate, as a European theatre of war is concerned, the surface of the sea has lost much of its advantage as a medium for surprise through secrecy.¹ Moreover, it is the element which is least suitable for the attainment of secrecy through movement by night combined with concealment by day. Surprise by sea is, therefore, limited either to movement in submersible vessels, or on the surface at such a range that a complete “bound” can be made during the course of a single night. What regions are included in this definition? The coast of France, Belgium, and Holland alone. The Mediterranean also is ruled out by reason of the distance between our naval bases, should any Mediterranean power be included among our enemies. Nor even, were the Bosphorus held, could we reach any point on the Russian Black Sea *littoral*.

For *concentration*, and to a lesser degree for *economy of force* and *co-operation*, the sea remains supreme for long-range movement. So long as we do not lapse to a position of naval inferiority, and so long also as we maintain the asset of our mercantile marine, we can best fulfil these principles strategically through the medium of amphibious

¹ While it might be suggested that the Germans' invasion of Norway in April, 1940, refuted this conclusion, their move was, in fact, quickly spotted by our air reconnaissance. But the short sea-distance between their ports to Oslo assured them of surprise by speed in the southern zone ; and in their more hazardous moves up the west coast it would seem that they were helped by the way our naval forces concentrated on seeking battle with the German Fleet, to the disregard of their troopships. (See page 295.)

The Next Great War

operations. Sea transport still holds the palm for bulk capacity and simplicity of organization. *Security* is dependent on the command of the sea, and, to a lesser degree, on command of the air.

Next we come to the air. For *mobility*, this channel of movement is easily superior to any other, and its margin of superiority must inevitably increase rather than decrease, as it is immune from the effect of natural obstacles, while it enjoys a decrease of atmospheric pressure, which retards movement. In regard to *surprise*, at low altitudes air transport is the most difficult of any to conceal, but there is no reason why aircraft movement should not be carried out at levels which preclude observation from the ground under the normal climatic conditions which prevail in Europe.¹ Further, the speed of aircraft is such that the need for secrecy in order to achieve *surprise* is considerably discounted. Being trackless, aircraft have a considerable advantage in regard to *security*.

Are we to assume that the air must necessarily become the sole medium for military movement? No, because there are certain inherent defects which threaten its otherwise preponderating advantages—viewed as a means of communication for the existing pattern of military forces. In the first place, aircraft have to descend at some time, and their landing places are vulnerable, particularly if temporary sites in the zone of the armies. Secondly, the carrying capacity of the heavier-than-air type is still very limited, whilst the gas-filled airship, although at present rather better in this respect, presents too great a target surface. In other words, the essential requirement of *concentration* is wanting, which defect weighs down the scales against air transport.

Turning to the land, we realize that movement by rail is governed by the communications established in peace-time. These, among the Powers of Western Europe, are unlikely to undergo any extensive alteration for commercial purposes,

¹ The trend of air warfare in 1940 bore out this speculation.

The Current of War

whilst definitely strategic railways excite suspicion and thereby defeat their object so far as surprise is concerned.

The railway, moreover, is of all means of communication the most difficult for secrecy, and most open to the operations of all branches of enemy intelligence. *Surprise in direction or time* is a virtual impossibility, and even in *quantity*, or concentration, increasingly hard to obtain with the development of observation from the air. Nevertheless, the railway, by reason of its transport capacity, remains at present the best medium for the achievement of *concentration*. In *mobility*, even in countries where the road system is highly developed, the railway is also far superior not only in regard to speed but because of its carrying capacity in proportion to space occupied. For *security*, road communication is a degree superior to rail, offering a more-easily concealed and more widely spaced target, a larger choice of alternative routes, and being more quickly repairable after damage has been inflicted. But if one transcendent lesson is to be drawn from the experiences of the last war, it is the inadequacy of either road or rail communication to cope with the requirements of modern armies. From the first German onset of August, 1914, to the final Allied advance of 1918, this lesson stands out above all others. Yet in neither of the cases we have mentioned were the difficulties in any considerable degree the result of hostile interference from the air—the trouble was from within rather than from without.

It is surely undeniable, however, that aircraft means of action must increase in range and effect, rather than diminish, with the passing years.

If this progress be axiomatic, then the nation which continues to organize its military communications on the basis of roads and railways is running for a fall.¹

What is the alternative? The condition common to both

¹ This was, unhappily, confirmed by the experience of the French in May, 1940, when their counter-moves in answer to the German thrust were dislocated by air attack on the rail and road communications.

'The Next Great War

these means of communication is that they move along fixed tracks, which cannot be varied save after a long period of labour and preparation. The opposite method to tracked movement is trackless. There is already in existence a means by which the fixed and prepared track is no longer a necessity—the chain-track machine, such as the Citroen tractors which have recently conquered the Sahara.

Let us study this form of movement over land.

Mobility, so far as speed is concerned, seems at first to be inevitably worse than by road transport—the slowest of all existing means of communication. On a level and prepared surface there can be no question that, where equal motive power is employed, the wheeled vehicle must be faster than the chain-track one. If the power is increased disproportionately in the case of the latter machine, then on economic grounds at least the change is for the worse.

But are the majority of roads level or of a good surface? Far from it! Moreover, this defect will be increased in most of the regions where our army is likely to operate, both by their existing shortage and by the heavy traffic caused by military movements. On roads that have been cut up or are little better than tracks, the caterpillar vehicle scores in speed every time over the wheeled vehicle. In the next place, the roads, of Europe particularly, are far from level, considered as a whole. On gradients, the caterpillar machine with the new sprung track is actually faster than the wheeled vehicle of equal horse-power; the feet of the track grip the surface better than the wheel, and have the further advantage that they damage the surface less—a factor of immense importance, not only for war but also for peace purposes.

Therefore, for the conveyance of loads the use of the caterpillar lorry is better *economy of force* than that of the wheeled lorry,¹ for its margin of superiority on poor surfaces

¹ At the time this was written, the wheeled lorry was a solid-tyred vehicle, and thus road-bound. Later, the invention of the six-wheeler opened up the

The Current of War

is immense, whilst on good surfaces, except in flat country, its lesser speed in proportion to power output on the level is balanced by its greater speed per horse-power in undulating country. The principle of *economy of force* tells us that a vehicle which has a definite commercial value has a decided advantage from a military standpoint, as its chances of mechanical development are greater and its expansion in emergency assured.

For *surprise*, the fact that the caterpillar vehicle can move off the roads defeats the enemy's *information* and establishes its superiority over the wheeled vehicle, which is of necessity tied to the arteries of traffic—these are shown on the map and can be kept under observation from the air.

In *concentration*, the caterpillar machine solves the problem of congestion, which has always been the brake on concentration of force at the decisive point.

It is not suggested that roads will be abandoned—so long as good roads exist it is more advantageous to use a smooth surface than a broken one. But the chain-track does enable the concentration of traffic on any particular line of movement to be multiplied, not merely double or quadruple, but ten-fold, twenty-fold, or even more. Moreover, even on the road the volume can be increased. The weight which can be carried in wheeled transport is regulated by the pressure per square foot which the road surface can support without damage. A three-ton lorry is the largest which normal roads can carry, and even then the injury is soon manifest. Thus on 100 yards of road space only some 24 tons can be borne by wheeled lorries, whereas by using 24-ton caterpillar lorries approximately 170 tons could be carried with an actual reduction of pressure per square foot on the surface. This reduction of road space required not only multiplies concentration, but necessarily increases the *mobility* of a force.

possibilities of cross-country movement by other than tracked vehicles, and this was followed by the development of the four-wheeled truck with oversize tyres.

The Next Great War

Security is made possible of achievement in the case of chain-tracked transport, for on the approach of danger from the air it can move off the road and seek shelter or decrease the target by dispersion—possibilities which are denied to the present lorry, with its one-dimensional power of movement. The former machine could, moreover, afford to sacrifice a fraction of its weight-carrying capacity in order to protect directly, by armour plating, the vital parts against any injury except that inflicted by a direct hit.

Future Development

In what respect is progress likely in these various means of movement as the result of scientific invention? If our speculations are to have any practical value, it is useless to indulge in flights of the imagination which take no account of the many problems of science still to be solved. We should confine ourselves to improvements of detail in means already existing, keeping our feet on the solid rock of truth as it is known to-day, rather than assuming, as certain, changes which involve a revolution in principle.

On the sea the large capacity submersible is a proved possibility. It does not, however, seem likely to supersede the surface ship as a general means of transport, as the cost and space wasted in making a ship submersible is not economic, and holds out no compensating advantages for mercantile purposes. As such vessels will necessarily be restricted to use in war, the number of them will, owing to financial causes, be small. They will, therefore, be available only for the conveyance of small striking forces against special objectives.

On land, neither railway nor road transport offers a prospect of radical development from a military point of view.

The cross-country machine capable of moving on and quitting the roads at will is an established fact and only requires improvements of detail. One line of development

The Current of War

is a machine which will combine wheels with a caterpillar track for alternative use.¹ More probable is a further improvement in springing, which will render feasible the use of an ordinary motor-lorry engine and at the same time enable the machine to move on roads at a speed equal to that of the present wheeled lorry and without appreciable increase of wear on the road surface.

In the air the airship, with its huge volume of gas-filled envelope in proportion to its small lifting power, is uneconomic.

In *mobility*, the aeroplane will still make progress. In *surprise* also, both by reason of its speed, and by the use of protective colouring and engine silencers. Its *security*, however, is hampered by the laws of gravity. Armoured protection can only be gained at the expense of carrying capacity, i.e., *concentration*, and even then is only possible within narrow limits. Practical experiments on present lines do not augur well for the production of the giant air liners beloved of the imaginative novelist.

Our conclusions, then, in regard to the strategic communications of the Imperial Military Forces, can be briefly summarized.

As an island state the first stage of our communications will still be by sea, in surface-travelling ships. Submersible transport can, however, be used to launch by surprise small and specially composed striking forces at suitable objectives.

The second stage of our communications, on land continents, should no longer be based primarily on the railway, but on caterpillar transport. *Mobility* indicates that the latter should move on the roads, provided that sufficient are available. *Surprise* indicates that movement should, so far as possible, be by night "bounds." *Security* tells us that caterpillar transport will quit the roads and move across country on the approach of enemy aircraft and on reaching

¹ This had made considerable progress by the time it was superseded by the six-wheeled vehicle.

The Next Great War

the zone where contact with the enemy land forces may be anticipated.

Aircraft transport may become a useful auxiliary, like the submersible ship, but no more, so long at least as ground troops remain a staple part of the national forces.

2. SCIENCE AND TACTICS

It is proposed in this second part of the essay to discuss the element of weapons, which is the main constituent of tactics, and to discover, as far as may be, the probable development of weapons and their respective values, as affected by the progress of scientific invention.

THE SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT OF WEAPONS IN RELATION TO THE EXISTING ARMS OF THE SERVICE

Infantry

At present the infantry unit resembles the stage brigand—with weapons of different kinds and patterns sticking out of every portion of his anatomy. To its staple weapon, the rifle and bayonet, have been added the light automatic, the machine-gun, the grenade—hand and rifle, explosive and smoke, the light mortar, and in some armies the accompanying gun, which is also advocated for our army in the form of pack artillery.

Is it advisable to utilize so varied an assortment of weapons?

The keynote of the value of infantry is *mobility*, or rather, locomobility—its still unique power to move in, over, and through every yard of any given locality. All these new weapons certainly add to the hitting power of infantry; but do they detract unduly from its mobility?—that is the test question. If they reduce that essential mobility to an appreciable degree, they discount the value of the increase in fire-power. Could fire-power alone win victory there

The Current of War

would be no place for infantry even in the armies of to-day ; the auxiliary arms can supply a far more potent fire. But infantry can carry its fire to close quarters and supply that tangible human threat which makes the enemy run.

Important as is fire in paving the way for the advance, it is in forward movement that the decision rests. The legs of the infantry are as essential on the battlefield as their "arms." Therefore we surely ought not to allot to infantry weapons which may induce it to rest content with firing on the enemy from more or less stationary positions.

If we apply our test of *mobility*, the machine-gun, the light mortar, and the accompanying gun are surely condemned at once as infantry offensive weapons.¹ Either they fall ever farther to the rear during the infantry advance or the pace of the real infantryman has to be checked constantly in order not to outstrip them. In the former case they are valueless assets to the infantry ; in the latter case they render the infantryman bankrupt of his mobility. The tests of *surprise* and *security* confirm this conclusion. These new weapons attract far greater attention and present a far larger target than the "pure" infantry. Depending for movement on limbers, pack mules, and—in the final stage—man-handling, they cannot afford the direct protection of armour, while at the same time they cannot avail themselves of the indirect protection of ground cover to the same degree as the infantry.

The principle of *economy of force* tells us that our organization should be as flexible and interchangeable as possible for tactical efficiency. Weapons which lead to dispersion of effort and wide variations of mobility are condemned by this test.

Internal *co-operation*, i.e., within the battalion, always one of the chief problems of battle, becomes far more difficult

¹ At the time this was written, these heavier infantry weapons were carried in horse-drawn vehicles. The argument did not apply to their use when carried in a tracked vehicle—as was eventually fulfilled when the armoured carrier, a miniature tank, was introduced.

The Next Great War

when the fractions which have to co-operate vary in armament and mobility.

The light automatic and the grenade suffer from the same disabilities but to a lesser extent. The danger in the case of the grenade can be avoided if the quantity issued to infantry is reduced to very small proportions. To do this in the case of the explosive grenade is to make it a negative asset, and therefore it should be reserved solely for the clearing of fortified defences. The effect of the smoke grenade is, however, of such value in proportion to its bulk, that it is economically sound to carry a few for action even in open warfare.

Owing to the usure of ammunition by a light automatic, the fact that it requires a minimum of three to four men for its service, and the appreciable loss of mobility entailed by it,¹ it is open to question whether it is superior to a section of well-trained riflemen. A reduction in weight that would make it more handy is a likely step in development, but this improvement would not justify its issue as an individual weapon owing to the rapid expenditure of ammunition.

Cavalry

The arguments for and against the retention of cavalry have been discussed at such length since the war that to recapitulate them would only be wearisome. Apply the test of *protection* (i.e., *security* to themselves), and the answer is so transparently clear that for a civilized war it is decisive. Cavalry in bulk are so vulnerable a target that they cannot exist on a modern battlefield. On the one hand, they cannot avail themselves of the direct protection of armour, nor, like the infantryman, can they make use of the indirect protection of ground. The cavalry charge, therefore, is dead—at least against efficient troops.

Further, as the use of any instrument in war depends on the existence in peace of its means for production, the horse

¹ This problem, again, was to find a solution in the armoured carrier.

The Current of War

must eventually become extinct in course of time, as it is being rapidly ousted for all commercial purposes. The horse cannot be bred rapidly in large quantities in emergency, as can be manufactured mechanical weapons and means of transport. Although, however, the supply is decreasing and will necessarily continue to decrease with the years, the progressive release of horses from the artillery and transportation services will ensure sufficient for the possible needs of cavalry for some period yet.

As cavalry are clearly obsolete for *hitting*, is there sufficient reason to justify their retention for the *security* of the army?

For long-distance and large-scale reconnaissance aircraft have displaced the cavalry body. But for close and wooded country the cavalry trooper moving on the ground can obtain detailed information denied to the observer above. The obvious solution to the problem we have propounded is that a certain proportion of cavalry should be retained for this purpose until such time as the locomobility of the caterpillar-tracked machine is fully equal to that of the horse in every respect. But the obvious solution is not necessarily correct. The man on foot is necessarily more loco-mobile than the man on horseback. The latter's superiority rests only in his *speed*, which is but a part of *mobility*.

A small and light chain-tracked machine could be produced even now which would move over any kind of ground traversable by cavalry, except dense woods and hill tracks. If the general mobility of such a machine is greater than that of the cavalryman, and the loco-mobility of the man on foot is similarly greater than that of the cavalryman, the deduction is surely that the sum of the two is greater. Any reconnaissance, therefore, could surely be carried out far quicker, and with at least equal results, by a chain-tracked machine, whose crew could leave their machine when necessary and carry out the detailed exploration on foot, than by the cavalryman. Moreover, the need of the

The Next Great War

latter for a horse-holder when he dismounts for reconnaissance over very broken ground infringes the principle of *economy of force*.

Artillery

What are the probable developments of the artillery in *mobility*, *hitting*, and *security*? Let us consider this arm in two categories—field artillery, including both light and medium guns; and heavy artillery.

(a) *Field Artillery*

These can only improve in mobility by being motorized, which implies that they are to be hauled by a caterpillar tractor, mounted on or carried in a caterpillar transporter, or fitted in a tank.

An increase in mobility will automatically increase the power of *concentration*.

Neither of the first two methods will affect indirect *security* by secrecy, but the third will diminish the possibilities of concealment by ground.

Direct *security* by protection, while in movement, is only possible by fitting the gun in a tank. The latter method loses the protection given by an emplacement, but compensates for this loss by the double security given by armour and by the fact that it is a moving target.

Finally, this method enables the gun to dispense with the necessity for being guarded, or secured, by another arm. The abolition of the need for an infantry escort or screen in front of the gun simplifies the problem of *co-operation*, the most difficult of all principles to fulfil in war.

Security against the enemy's information is likewise far easier to achieve if the gun is constantly changing its position, as it will if fitted in the tank, or to a lesser degree if mounted on a transporter.

(b) *Heavy Artillery*

As this form of artillery is already moved mechanically,

The Current of War

an appreciable improvement in *mobility* cannot be anticipated. *Hitting* power is the only factor susceptible of material progress.

The question is rather as to the value of heavy artillery. First, let us consider *hitting*. The aeroplane can hit with equal effect, but not so rapidly or frequently. It can also hit a moving target with greater accuracy. If the armies of the future are to be composed of mechanically moved units, the heavy gun loses its target. In that case the heavy gun will be relegated to the bombardment of fixed fortified bases or towns, as it was in the past ; it will lose its utility with field armies.¹

Secondly, *security*. The heavy gun cannot hit its aggressors, the aeroplane and, possibly, the tank, while they can hit it with impunity once they discover its location. By reason of its size, it is difficult to secure it against enemy information and blows.

Tanks

Let us now test by our table the tank of the modern type, with its sprung track, maximum speed of 28-30 m.p.h., and an average speed across country of 15-20 m.p.h.²

In *mobility*, the tank has a vast margin over all other arms except cavalry, which, however, is placed out of court by reason of the fact that it can never use its speed against modern firearms.

In *secrecy* (for *surprise* and *security*) the tank is inferior to the other arms. Its speed, combined with the power of discharging smoke-clouds, redresses this defect to a considerable degree, but does not entirely balance it.

Hitting power demands a more detailed examination and must be weighed with *concentration* and *economy of force*. The economic unit of infantry which corresponds approximately to the tank is the platoon, the replacement, repair, and petrol cost of the former being balanced by the fact that

¹ The campaign of 1940 bore out this surmise.

² This referred to the 11-ton Vickers tank which was then being produced, and was issued to the Army the following year.

The Next Great War

the pay, food, and maintenance of its crew is but a fraction of that of the platoon. The infantry platoon has an armament of two light machine-guns and 24 rifles—including the section commanders and the spare men of the light automatic sections. To this must be added a half-share in a heavy machine-gun and an eighth share in a light mortar. Assessing the tank armament at the minimum of one 3-pounder gun and three light machine-guns, the fire-power of the tank is seen to be clearly superior, especially when it is remembered that the tank can fire during movement, whereas the platoon has its fire-power reduced by one-half, at least, owing to the need for covering fire.

Co-operation, again, is demonstrably simpler in the case of a self-contained tank than between four infantry sections.

Security likewise gives the tank a clear margin of superiority over all arms, for it alone can carry direct protection by armour. The field-gun's armoured shield is not all-round protection, nor is it available during movement.

Aircraft

Although these are at present organized as a separate service, apart from the military forces of the nation, they must be included in any survey, as they act over land and, therefore, exert a profound influence on the action of the land forces.

Let us, therefore, consider aircraft strictly in regard to their operation against the land forces.

In *mobility* they have a tremendous superiority over all the other arms.

In *secrecy* (for *surprise* and *security*) they are at an equal inferiority tactically, for, save in exceptional conditions, early warning of their approach is obtainable. Against arms which have the power of quickly sheltering, like infantry, under cover of ground, or, like tanks, by rapidity of movement and the use of smoke-screens, this lack of secrecy of approach is a disadvantage.

The Current of War

In *concentration* of hitting power, aircraft are difficult to assess. Their development is, however, subject to restrictions, due to gravity, from which the ground-moving arms are free.

In *co-operation* they share in the advantage of the tank.

In *security* they are, at present, most vulnerable save for the indirect security afforded by their mobility. The armoured aeroplane is, however, already in course of development. But this protection, to whatever degree it is increased, will always be subject to the limitations of gravity. Here lies the joint in the aeroplane's harness.

The Gas Weapon

No investigation of future war can overlook this weapon, which cannot be abolished by the decrees of Leagues and Conferences.

Economy of Force.—Its speed and economy of manufacture are superior to that of any other weapon, because it is the only one which is a commercial product, manufactured from chemicals which are an essential requirement of peace-time industry. In emergency, therefore, there is no need for the tardy establishment of special plant.

Mobility.—In speed of discharge it is necessarily supreme, because it is continuous, which not even the quicker-firing missile projector can be.

Surprise.—In secrecy of manufacture it is unequalled, because its constituent chemicals are commercial products, and can, therefore, defeat the enemy's *information*. All other weapons are, in part at least, destined for a definite military purpose, and so their production in quantity cannot be kept secret except at the expense of *concentration* of hitting effect.

In *secrecy* of discharge it is paramount, because it is noiseless, and, if used at night or combined with smoke, invisible.

In *hitting power* and *concentration* it is supreme in three ways : firstly, its volume is infinitely greater than any projectile—the most rapid-firing missile projector, the machine-gun,

The Next Great War

can only fire 600 bullets in a minute, whereas the gas cylinder can discharge millions of invisible bullets or molecules in the same time ; secondly, unlike any projectile, it leaves no voids unswept in its beaten zone ; thirdly, it requires no skill in aiming and is therefore unaffected by the emotions or physical deficiencies of the firer.

Security serves to emphasize the superiority of gas, for an antidote can only be produced by those who know its actual constituents. Therefore, the users of a new kind of gas possess an almost certain chance of effecting a surprise against a totally unprotected enemy, whilst they themselves have a complete immunity from danger from their own weapons. The indirect value of this immunity is even more far-reaching than the direct, for their progress is in no way hampered by the fear of masking fire or by the curtain of an artillery barrage. Thus the dreaded interval between the lifting of fire and the actual clash of the troops is abolished.

It may be argued that we cannot consider the employment of gas, because the moral sanction of the peoples is refused to it. But if it be demonstrated that gas is more humane than any missile weapons, because it can achieve its object—the capitulation of the enemy—equally well in a non-lethal form, this moral prohibition on its use will be removed.

THE ELIMINATION OF TRADITIONAL ARMS

Having surveyed the probable developments in weapons and analysed the qualities of each, let us endeavour to draw conclusions from them. To do so, let us consider the various arms of the service and their weapons in relationship to each other. As gas is established in our mind as a weapon of the future, let us make it the starting-point of our comparison. How can the respective arms protect themselves against its effect? Aircraft, by rising above it ; tanks, by being airtight and producing their own oxygen inside whilst being impervious to the outer atmosphere ; infantry, cavalry, and

The Current of War

field artillery by the use of some form of respirator. A respirator is only proof against known kinds of gas ; it cannot be worn for long without incapacitating its wearer from active exertion ; it cannot protect the whole body, unless it be transformed into a complete diver's suit, in which movement would be almost impossible. If a man cannot move freely, he cannot fight. If a horse cannot move, what use is his rider ? If the artilleryman cannot serve the gun freely and the gun is immovable, field artillery is useless. Therefore, we are left with the aeroplane and the tank as the only effective arms, if gas becomes a standard weapon.

This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that, as gas requires a projector, the latter needs to be carried. To move it mechanically is obviously better in every respect than to move it by muscular power—for *mobility, surprise, concentration, security, and economy of force*. Given that the factor of bringing gas to its place of discharge is equal, cloud gas is infinitely superior in effect to shell gas. This consideration rules out the artillery as its means of projection.

But are even two separate arms necessary ? Cannot the use of aircraft dispense with the need for tanks or the reverse ?

No, because they act in different elements, possess different qualities and limitations, and neither is decisively superior to the other when they meet in direct opposition.

In offence the aeroplane is invulnerable to the tank, so long as it remains at a sufficient altitude. But from this height it can only hit the tank by a rain of gas. Against this weapon, infantry, cavalry, and artillery can only protect themselves fully at the price of their mobility and hitting power—in which case they have no value. The tank, however, can be made air-tight and defeat the purpose of the aeroplane. Therefore the aeroplane is forced to descend very low, if it is to have a chance of hitting by bomb or bullet so small and rapidly moving a target as the tank. If it flies low, the tank can hit back effectively. The odds in such a contest would be on the side of the aeroplane because of its infinitely

The Next Great War

superior speed and its power of three-dimensional movement ; but they would not be long odds, because the effect of gravity weights the scales against the aeroplane and in favour of the tank in the struggle to increase *concentration* of fire-power and *protection* by armour. In its turn the tank has a clear margin in counter-offence by attacking the landing and refilling grounds of the aeroplane. The latter is severely handicapped here, because it can only conduct its defence from the air.

These bascs of the aeroplane can, however, be fortified against the tank's attack. Here we discover the only future use for infantry and artillery—as the stationary defenders of these fortified bases.

Therefore, where gas is installed as the primary weapon, our deduction is that the forces which act over the land will be composed principally of aircraft and tanks, with a certain proportion of heavy artillery as fortress destroyers, and of infantry, armed with super-heavy machine-guns firing armour-piercing bullets, and light artillery as fortified base-defenders.

Let us assume, however, that the warring powers will abide by the wishes of the League of Nations and Disarmament Conferences, and that they will not employ the gas weapon. To what extent will our deductions be affected ? To solve this question let us propound, and try to answer, a series of questions.

1. What are the foes of infantry and how can it act against them ?

First, the *hostile infantry*—whose resistance is based mainly on machine-guns and light automatics. How does it counter these ? Not by its own fire so much as by the aid of artillery and tanks. Infantry is only self-sufficient when it has passed through the organized screen of enemy fire and got to grips with the hostile infantry. *Co-operation* between two different arms is so difficult in practice that a

The Current of War

single arm is clearly preferable if it can act as effectively. The only part of the infantry attack which the tank cannot execute with infinitely greater efficiency and economy is the final phase of digging the enemy out from their earths—natural or artificial.

Second, the *enemy artillery*—whom it is usually powerless to reach and whom it can only counter by the aid of other arms ; unnecessary problem of co-operation once again.

Third, the *enemy tank*. Infantry cannot act offensively against the tank, because the speed of the latter can always enable it to avoid conflict at will. Infantry's only direct means of defence against the tank are by anti-tank accompanying gun or machine-gun, or by the land mine. If either of the former category of weapons is used, we are brought back to the old struggle of projectile *v.* armour, with the odds all in favour of the tank, because, being mechanically moved, it can increase its ratio of *protection*, whereas the infantry anti-tank weapon, being muscle-moved, cannot increase its ratio of penetrative power without becoming immobile. If it becomes immobile, it is useless to infantry in the field ; if it adopts the other alternative and becomes mechanically moved, it is no longer an infantry weapon, but a tank. As regards the land mine, the only form which can be portable and rapid in employment is one which is small and visible ; even then it suffers from the grave defect that it negatives *offensive* action by infantry. Such a mine can be exploded harmlessly by some form of tender in front of the tank. If a large land-mine is used for buried systems, it is only available for restricted areas and in stationary defence, a confession that infantry are only fortress defenders.

Fourth, the *enemy aeroplane*. Infantry in the open have no effective means of hitting the aeroplane unless it comes low. The aeroplane, on the other hand, can remain at a moderate height and by bomb and bullet inflict serious injury on its helpless victims, who can only hope to lessen, not to escape,

The Next Great War

casualties by dispersion or by turning themselves into human moles.

Thus we are forced to the conclusion that, as infantry cannot effectively *hit* any of its opponents except by co-operation with other arms—a co-operation to which it contributes no assets—its value in war vanishes, except for two special functions. These are, first, as the defender of positions fortified by nature or art, and secondly, as the “ferret” to eject from these positions its opposite number.

It is needless to consider cavalry, for it suffers from all the disabilities of infantry, save only that by reason of its speed it has an increased chance of escaping from the tank, but less from the aeroplane because of the greater target which it offers.

2. What are the foes of field artillery and how can it act against them?

First, the opposing artillery—for which it needs the *co-operation* of aircraft for information. Aircraft can destroy artillery, which cannot—as does the tank—escape by speed, without the co-operation of any other arm.

Second, the infantry. While artillery suffers less risk from infantry, the last war proved that it is less effective than the tank in destroying infantry. If this was so in a war of positions, how much greater the disparity in a war of mobility, where the infantry can hope to escape artillery fire by movement, but never the tank.

Third, the tank. The field-gun was undoubtedly the most effective anti-tank weapon of the last war, but it is questionable whether, in the later stages, it destroyed more tanks than the latter destroyed guns. Such successes as it obtained were against tanks moving at not more than 3 m.p.h. What chance would it have against a tank zigzagging at a speed of over 20 m.p.h.? If it cannot hit, it will be hit. To have any chance the gun must have a fixed mounting with all-round traverse—in which case it is no longer a field weapon unless it is fitted in a tank! The latter method is the

The Current of War

obvious solution, for only a weapon of equal mobility can compel the tank to come to action.

Finally, we come to the aeroplane and the tank, which have already been considered in their relation to the other arms and to each other. How, and with what weapons, will aeroplane fight aeroplane, and tank fight tank? Not with gas, because both the aeroplane and the tank can be made gas-proof. Rather, with armour-piercing projectiles. Both machines are independently moving and fighting self-contained units, fulfilling in the higher degree the principles of *hitting power*, direct *security* by armour, *economy of force*, facility for gaining the *objective*, *surprise*, *mobility*, and *co-operation* both between the parts and from above, which here signifies that the commander has the power of instantaneous control. What established type of fighting organism already possesses the combination of these qualities? The warship.

Thus the tactics of tank *versus* tank must, of necessity, conform in principle to those of naval war, while overhead Tennyson's "airy navies grappling in the central blue" find literal and not only figurative fulfilment.

If, therefore, we have at our disposal for use on land a machine capable of fulfilling the complete rôle of a self-contained fighting organism, which can dispense with the need for external *co-operation*—that thorniest of problems—is it a rational policy to retain arms which are essentially incomplete?

To do so would be equivalent to the folly of sending a thousand swimmers armed with grenades and supported by floating batteries to attack a man-of-war. Everyone realizes the farcical nature of this suggestion. Is there not a want of common sense in the common failure to grasp the superiority of the tank over an amalgam of infantry, cavalry, artillery, and infantry-bound tanks—the latter like mongrel curs snivelling at the heels of a stout and sluggish dowager, instead of like hounds on the scent of their quarry.

The Next Great War

SUMMARY

The sum of our deductions is clearly that military operations in the future, the exact date being still indefinite, will be carried out almost predominantly by fleets of tanks and aircraft, which will be maintained by communications based on the caterpillar tractor, with the aeroplane transporter as an auxiliary or secondary line of supply. Under these conditions heavy artillery and infantry will alone survive of the other arms, the former functioning again in the original defensive rôle of garrison artillery, whilst infantry will become a species of "land-marines" for the defence of fortified bases and to be discharged as "landing" parties, from the bowels of a tank fleet, for "ferret work" against suitable objectives. But to suppose that this metamorphosis from traditional armies will be accomplished as by the wave of a wizard's wand betokens an ignorance of the slow fruition of all new changes throughout history, due to the natural conservatism of the military masses even more than that of the leaders. When, as at present, this conservatism is reinforced by the most severe financial stringency, we must realize that "axes" are more probable than "wands" and have a keener edge. The consummation of the common-sense pattern army which we have sketched is therefore likely to be a slow process, comprising a series of limited "bounds."

CHAPTER II

A "NEW MODEL" ARMY

This chapter embraces the second part of my 1922 paper, dealing with the question as to what would be "the organization and training required to secure the views which you may have formed as regards the Imperial military forces." It would be tedious to the reader to repeat the lengthy detail of the organization proposed, much of which has long since been fulfilled, so it is merely summarized. But the section concerned with the training of the "New Model" is given in full, as many of its points are still as pertinent to-day as when first made.

DIFFICULTIES, as the great captains have repeatedly told us, are made to be overcome, and there is always a danger that, by undue concern with the risks of a new policy, we may fail to put our full energy into the task of overcoming them—and so find ourselves outstripped by a rival who has not lost sight of the end in his concern with the means.

Rome was not built in a day, nor will be the "new model" army. But since the history of the material world is a tale of the replacement of the human muscles by the machine, even the most obstinate reactionary cannot put back the hands of the clock of progress.

Civil developments in mechanical science have repeatedly and continuously influenced and altered the methods of warfare. The longbows of medieval England had to give way to the musket; the "wooden walls" that were our bulwark on the sea yielded to the ironclad; the sailing ship was replaced by the steamship, and swift victorious

A "New Model" Army

concentrations on land are no longer effected as were Napoleon's "by the legs of his soldiers," but by the railway and the motor.

The replacement of muscle-power by machine-power is the cardinal fact in every department of material life, and it would be absurd to pretend that warfare can hold out against this tendency or remain "in splendid isolation."

But while we concede that the end is inevitable, we cannot be sure of the exact shape it will assume. The claims both of national economy and security warn us against revolutionary changes. We must advance gradually, aiming at a progressive increase in hitting power—the compound interest from greater mobility, concentration effect, and fire-power—without sacrificing any appreciable degree of our security.

While, as we have said, it is impossible to foretell the exact shape that the armaments of the future will take, it is both safer and wiser, in the light of history, to assume a development along existing lines, through the overcoming of technical difficulties already half solved, than to anticipate the employment of means yet undiscovered or untried, such as germs or electrical rays. Accepting the evolution of existing means as a rational basis for our speculations, any scheme of transition is still conditioned by the factor of financial stringency and the necessity of avoiding any leaps in the dark which might jeopardize our present degree of security.

The scheme of "progressive mechanization" was divided into two periods, which were subdivided into stages—based on a recognition of the practical limitation that the Government were not likely to agree to any increase in the Army Estimates. So I endeavoured to show how, in each stage, the money for new equipment might be balanced by corresponding cuts in the older types of unit and in less essential directions.

In the first stage the divisional transport was to be completely converted to a mechanical basis. In the second stage the

The Current of War

infantry battalion transport would be mechanized. In the third stage, the field artillery would follow suit ; the majority of it being tractor-drawn, but a proportion mounted on tank chassis with armoured protection for the crew. In the fourth stage, the infantry would be provided with sufficient armour-protected vehicles, capable of cross-country movement, to carry the whole personnel of the battalion—thus bringing them much fresher, as well as more rapidly, to the battlefield than if they had to march. Meanwhile “ a gradual reduction of the infantry would be taking place, together with a proportionate increase of the Tank Corps ”—this process of substitution being spread over the whole period.

The new model division at the end of this period might, it was suggested, comprise three battalions of heavy tanks, three of medium tanks and one of light-medium tanks for reconnaissance and pursuit. It would also include a tank-bridging battalion, and a mechanized workshop battalion. The infantry component would be nine battalions, reduced in size from sixteen to twelve platoons, and carried in mechanized vehicles. The artillery would consist of nine tractor-drawn field batteries, and three of artillery tanks.

When we reached the second, and more speculative period, evolution would become revolution. The tank was likely to swallow the infantryman, the field artilleryman, the engineer, and the signaller, as well as the cavalryman. And the mechanized army would be combined with the air force under a single control. “ The logical sequence of events points to the land, or rather over-land forces being composed principally of tanks and aircraft, with a small force of siege artillery, for the reduction and defence of the fortified tank and aircraft bases, and of mechanical-borne infantry for use as land-marines.”

“ Tanks will probably crystallize into three main types : light and very fast scout tanks of, say, 6-8 tons, armed with machine-guns and armoured over the vitals only ; fast cruiser tanks of about 20 tons, well-armoured and with an armour-piercing gun as primary armament ; heavy battle tanks of 35-50 tons.” “ A division of this period might comprise a battalion of scout tanks, two brigades of cruiser tanks, and a brigade of battle tanks, together with a train of 30-ton supply tanks. Several squadrons of aeroplanes would make up the division.” Apart from the infantry required for use with

A "New Model" Army

heavy artillery in siege operations, a proportion would be carried with the armoured division in special transporter tanks, and used as "landing parties" to clear fortified points and hill defences under cover of the fire from the tank fleet.

After this discussion of the organization of the new model in the immediate and ultimate future, the essay passed to the subject of training. This final section is reproduced below.

The Training of the "New Model"

In discussing the subject of training it is essential on the one hand to avoid general detail, the value of which, under such altered conditions, must be purely speculative, and on the other hand to shun platitudes, which are of no practical value. Our actual methods of training to-day when conscientiously applied by commanders and instructors, have reached so high a standard that improvement can only come in the two extremes of principle and detail.

To lay down a complete system would involve an unnecessary repetition of much that is to be found in the textbooks. Instead, it is proposed merely to touch upon certain avenues of development suggested by reflection on the unchanging principles of war.

Economy of Force. If one lesson stands out above all others from our study, it is that simplicity is the keynote of the military evolution outlined; that from the complexity of existing weapons and arms we shall gradually evolve, first, an army in which the weapons of each arm are reduced in variety, and then the arms themselves, until finally we have an army of tanks and aircraft. Unity of organization demands unity of training; we cannot hope for a thoroughly trained mechanical army until we cease to expect isolated detachments of isolated arms to become efficient for combined operation in war.

During the training season, each new model division should be concentrated in some large area where combined training and frequent battle practice can be carried out. Salisbury Plain, though not ideal, is the only existing training

The Current of War

area which might serve. Another should soon be possible at Catterick. Wales could provide one or two, the neighbourhood of Llanfyllin, in the north, and of Llandovery, in the south, being examples. These areas would provide every form of terrain.

To ensure that each division has full advantage of the varying conditions in each area, the divisions would spend the training season in a different area each year. With the development of mechanical movement, two areas might be visited by each division—the complete moves being made by road, so saving the cost of rail transport.

A further suggestion under the heading of economy of force is an increase in the Territorial Army establishment of officers and non-commissioned officers, and a greater concentration on the training of these leaders to form a cadre for expansion in time of national emergency—the cost, if necessary, being offset by a reduction of the infantry rank and file, who could be intensively trained in numbers on mobilization. In the technical and mechanical branches, which will increase with the progressive mechanization of the Army, there is, however, need to tap the civilian reservoirs of skilled tradesmen. These would in many cases as recruits find themselves with a basis of knowledge which would render them fit to fill their rôle in the war-machine even after a spare-time training.

Co-operation. The essential unity of training, the need for which was emphasized above, would appear to demand the creation of a combined junior commanders' school. At this school the young officer and non-commissioned officer would learn the elements of combined tactics, the methods and necessity for close co-operation in battle, and gain an appreciation of the qualities of other arms, thereby quenching early any tendency to develop a narrow outlook.

At the same time Woolwich and Sandhurst might be merged in a single Military College, at which the cadet straight from school should learn the groundwork of

A "New Model" Army

soldiering and develop and broaden his intellect along military, scientific, and historical lines. Under present conditions, while at the most plastic age, he passes from the comparatively narrow mental channels of school life direct to the technical grooves of Woolwich and Sandhurst, the result being, in a number of cases, that he tends to become in intellect and outlook a representative and partisan of one particular arm before he has even become a soldier. One of the greatest dangers with which every profession is faced is the loss of mental elasticity by those who give up their lives to its service.

While we are producing technical experts from our Military College, we should not lose sight of the fact that man is master of the machine, and that the power of leadership is as important as technical qualifications. But whereas we instructed our budding leader in every other branch of military knowledge, in the past we neglected to help him to develop those powers of leadership which are often latent in the most unpromising material. Although a considerable advance has been made in this direction, there are still channels which might be worth exploring.

We cannot rely solely on his public school experience and natural intuition to teach the young officer how to get the best out of his men. Incidentally, it may be pointed out that the boy has hitherto gone into the Army at an earlier age than to Oxford or Cambridge, and so in many cases never attained to prefectorial responsibilities. For the boy who develops late, a little guidance in the art of leadership might often suffice to bring out his capacity while still a cadet, and so preserve for the benefit of the Service many a career of great possibilities which at present comes to an untimely end.

The rudiments of psychology should, it is therefore suggested, form part of the curriculum of the military cadet, together with a more advanced course for the young officer at the Junior Commanders' School.

The Current of War

Surprise. In past centuries the scientific development in weapons was so slow, and the military hierarchy so conservative, that comparatively few wars have been determined by the possession by one side of a superior weapon. But the majority of wars have been decided by some new development in the science of war, most frequently in means of movement or tactics. Philip's Macedonian phalanx, Hannibal's tactics of surprise, Nero's use of interior lines, resulting in the Metaurus victory, Cæsar's use of a reserve, the English longbow of Crecy and Poitiers, Cromwell's Ironsides, Marlborough's development of manœuvre, Frederick's oblique order, Napoleon's *bataillon carré* and swift concentrations, Moore's light infantry, Wellington's defensive-offensive tactics and line formation, Moltke's staff system, are but a few examples of how the instrument forged, or the tactics thought out, in peace have decided the fate of nations.¹

As changes in weapons now succeed each other so rapidly, the task of assimilating the lessons which they bring with them becomes more and more difficult. Yet the nation whose military advisers grasp most quickly the truth behind every new development has an advantage which grows more decisive with the increasingly greater effect of each successive new weapon.

The very zenith of surprise is to obtain one at the outset of a war. Research, accordingly, becomes a matter of the most vital importance to the security of a nation. An expansion of technical research and design establishments is a need so urgent as to brook no delay.

But to possess a new weapon is of little value unless we also know how to exploit its advantages to the utmost when we use it. Because of the failure to ensure that progress in tactics kept pace with progress in weapons, the Germans threw away their chance of decisive surprise on the introduction of gas, and we were similarly at fault with the tank.

¹ The fate of France in 1940 was to be a further example.

A "New Model" Army

It would seem essential, therefore, that a tactical research department should be created to work in close co-operation with the technical branch. At the same time, we need to maintain an experimental formation, commanded and staffed by the pick of our military talent and assured of continuity of composition, in order to test out practically the application to the troops of new tactical and technical ideas.

The principle of mobility indicates that training should be directed to develop an efficient man and an efficient unit in the least possible time. The idea that it took seven years to produce a trained soldier was surely dissipated by the experience of the last war. It is not suggested that the uncut stone was polished to its highest possible pitch of brilliancy at the end of the intensive training courses during the war, nor that the finished article was even efficient for the varied conditions of war for which the British Army is normally expected to be prepared. Nevertheless, a mean is surely possible.

One truth at least the war proved : that the more the recruit's intelligence had been educated and developed beforehand, the quicker he could be trained. The more mechanical an army as a whole becomes, the more emphasis this lesson will receive. It is suggested, therefore, that on joining his depot, a considerably increased portion of the recruit's time should be devoted to education, both general and mechanical. This education should not, however, be divorced from the man's military life. Every problem set and every subject studied should bear on his military training, so that almost unconsciously he is absorbing and developing the elements of his military work.

Our next suggestion towards speed and efficiency of training is that the manuals should be divided into standards, just as the school textbooks are graduated. Manuals such as the present F.S.R. are in many ways excellent for senior officers, although a comparison with the French suggests

The Current of War

that there is still room for improvement in clearness and classification of matter. But the normal junior officer is apt to shun the manuals. How often does one hear the confession made, as if it were a source of pride, that the speaker never reads a military manual or book. Yet the manuals should be an epitome of military wisdom, and a "pillar of fire by night" to the aspiring junior leader. Is it not probable that the trouble is partly due to the manner of presentation? Quality, not quantity, should be the motto of their compilers, with whom, however, the fault does not always lie. It would greatly help if the authorities withdrew their veto on any breaking away from General Staff language.¹ A clear and definite tone should replace vagueness and reservations; metaphor, word picture and sketch should lighten the path of the leader; the impersonal "it will be done" might be substituted by the more vivid "You will do this." By the ruthless "axing" of repeated reservations and superfluous details, the manuals should be made as short as they could be simple to understand. A small octavo page and larger print would also inspire the subaltern with more desire to study them.

Epilogue

In conclusion, let it be reaffirmed that the note which rings throughout this essay is that of all qualities in war it is speed which is dominant, speed both of mind and movement—without which hitting-power is valueless and with which it is multiplied. Napoleon expressed this in his dictum that force in war is mass (or as we should better interpret it under modern conditions—fire-power), multi-

¹ This observation was prompted by my experience when writing the post-war *Infantry Training* manual. The War Office and the Staff College authorities raised objections on the ground that it was not written in "General Staff language." I pointed out in reply that *Infantry Training* was intended for the enlightenment of the junior officer and N.C.O., not for the instruction of the General Staff. The force of this argument, apparently new, was admitted by authority—but it was then too late to restore the simpler phrasing of the original draft, and the word-pictures which had been cut out.

A "New Model" Army

plied by velocity. This speed, only to be obtained by the full development of scientific inventions, will transform the battlefields of the future from squalid trench labyrinths into arenas wherein manoeuvre, the essence of surprise, will reign again after hibernating for too long within the mausoleums of mud. Then only can the art of war, temporarily paralysed by the grip of trench warfare conditions, come into its own once more. History, even recent history in the more open theatres of war such as Palestine, shows us that as a race we need not fear the result if skill in leadership is liberated from these fettering conditions.

Four years passed before an experimental mechanized force was formed, in 1927, to carry out practical tests of the new conception. The results were so promising as to inspire the General Staff to foreshadow the creation of new model "armoured divisions." But after two seasons this first armoured force was broken up, and experiments again became sporadic, as well as haphazard in direction. Not until 1934 was the first tank brigade definitely established, enabling trials to become a systematic process. And not until 1937 was the ten-year-old promise at last fulfilled by the formation of an armoured division—by which time Germany, despite her late start, had just created her fourth.

More surprising perhaps was the slowness of authority to carry out steps towards the improvement of training which involved a much less radical change, and had seemed to me common sense when I suggested them in 1922. The proposal to combine Woolwich and Sandhurst into a single military cadet college had to wait seventeen years for fulfilment. And so did the idea of creating a school for junior commanders. The improvement of the training manuals was carried so far that, after thirteen years, a more readable size of page was introduced—but had not gone much further before the next war came. The idea of creating a tactical research department was nearly adopted in 1937, but was ultimately dropped. The idea of utilizing motor-power to give divisions a change of training ground was to have been fulfilled in September, 1939, when the Aldershot troops were intended to carry out

The Current of War

manœuvres in Yorkshire—but the war, unfortunately, intervened.

The psychological obstacles which hindered more rapid progress may be illustrated by citing a speech made by Lord Haig in the summer of 1925, at the time I set forth a picture of future mechanized warfare, on land and in the air, in a little book, *Paris, or the Future of War*. Very different, however, was the view of the most influential British soldier, the Commander-in-Chief of our armies in France in the last war :

“Some enthusiasts to-day talk about the probability of horses becoming extinct and prophesy that the aeroplane, the tank, and the motor-car will supersede the horse in future wars. I believe that the value of the horse and the opportunity for the horse in the future are likely to be as great as ever. . . . I am all for using aeroplanes and tanks, but they are only accessories to the man and the horse, and I feel sure that as time goes on you will find just as much use for the horse—the well-bred horse—as you have ever done in the past.”

Three years later, in 1928, at the time our first mechanized force was disbanded, the Press were invited to a conference when a senior officer informed them that : “Cavalry are indispensable. Tanks are no longer a menace.”

CHAPTER III

AIMING AT THE MORAL OBJECTIVE

In the essay reproduced in the two previous chapters, my treatment of the problems of another war was naturally limited by the terms of the subject set that year. It was a military essay primarily concerned with the future of the Army. In writing my little book *Paris, or the Future of War* for the "To-day and To-morrow Series" in 1925, I had an opportunity to discuss wider aspects, and to set forth my broad conception of future warfare.

Some of the main passages are reproduced in this chapter (the book having been out of print for many years).

TO achieve a more scientific and economic military policy it is necessary that public opinion should be awakened not only to the results but also to the false foundations of the present theory of war.

Men of the Anglo-Saxon race are not willing to hand over their religious or political conscience into the keeping of "authority," yet by their lack of interest in military questions they do, in fact, relinquish any check on a policy which affects the security of their lives and livelihoods to an even greater extent. For, when war bursts upon the nation, it is the ordinary citizens who pay the toll either with their lives or from their pockets. Only by taking an active interest in the broad aspects of national defence, and so regaining control of their military conscience, can they avoid being driven like sheep to the shearer and slaughter-house, as in the last war.

PERMANENT NATIONAL OBJECTS

If the citizens of a nation were asked what should be the general aim of the national policy, they would reply,

The Current of War

in tenor if not in exact words, that it should be such as to guarantee them "an honourable, prosperous, and secure existence."

No normal citizen of a democracy would willingly imperil this by a resort to war. Only when he considers, or it is suggested to him convincingly, that his honour, prosperity, or security are endangered by the policy of another nation, will he consent to the grave step of making war.

When, however, the fateful decision for war has been taken, what does common sense tell us should be the national objective? To ensure a resumption and progressive continuance of what may be termed the peace-time policy, with the shortest and least costly interruption of the normal life of the country.

What stands in the way of this? The determination of the hostile nation to enforce its contrary policy in defiance of our own aims and desires. To gain our aim or objective we have to change this adverse will into a compliance with our own policy, and the sooner and more cheaply in lives and money we can do this, the better chance is there of a continuance of national prosperity in the widest sense.

The aim of a nation in war is, therefore, to subdue the enemy's will to resist, with the least possible human and economic loss to itself.

If we realize that this is the true objective, we shall appreciate the fact that the *destruction* of the enemy's armed forces is but a means—and not necessarily an inevitable or infallible one—to the attainment of our goal. It is clearly not, despite the assertion of military pundits, the sole true objective in war. Clear the air of the fog of catchwords which surrounds the conduct of war, grasp that in the human will lies the source and mainspring of all conflict, as of all other activities of man's life, and it becomes transparently clear that our goal in war can only be attained by the subjugation of the opposing will. All *acts*, such as defeat in the field, propaganda, blockade, diplomacy, or attack on

Aiming at the Moral Objective

the centres of government and population, are seen to be but means to that end ; and, instead of being tied to one fixed means, we are free to weigh the respective merits of each. To choose whichever are most suitable, most rapid, and most economic, i.e., which will gain the goal with the minimum disruption of our national life during and *after* the war. Of what use is decisive victory in battle if we bleed to death as a result of it ?

A single man can be beaten by the simple process of killing him. Not so a nation—for total extermination, even if it were possible, would recoil on the heads of the victors in the close-knit organization of the world's society, and would involve their own ethical and commercial ruin—as we have had a foretaste from the attrition policy of the Great War. But besides being mutually deadly it is unnecessary, for a highly organized state is only as strong as its weakest link. In a great war the whole nation is involved, though not necessarily, or wisely, under arms. The fists and the sinews of war are mutually dependent, and, if we can demoralize one section of the nation, the collapse of its will to resist compels the surrender of the whole—as the last months of 1918 demonstrated.

It is the function of grand strategy to discover and exploit the Achilles' heel of the enemy nation ; to strike not against its strongest bulwark, but against its most vulnerable spot. In the earliest recorded war, Paris, son of Priam, King of Troy, thus slew the foremost champion of the Greeks. As the Greek legend runs : Achilles, when a child, having been dipped by his mother, Thetis, in the waters of the Styx, his whole body became invulnerable save only the heel by which she held him. In the Trojan war, after Achilles had slain Hector in direct combat, Paris brought stratagem to bear, and his arrow, guided by Apollo, struck Achilles in his vulnerable heel.

After dashing out the lives of millions in vain assault against the enemy's strength, it might not be amiss now to

The Current of War

take a lesson from the objective aimed at by Paris three thousand years ago.

Turning from myth to history, it may be useful to glance at two authentic examples of the use of the moral objective—which in each case changed the course of the world's history.

[The first of the examples discussed was the struggle between Rome and Carthage—and the way that Scipio undermined Hannibal's invincibility by an indirect approach, striking at his sources of supply and moral base. The second example given was the collapse of Napoleon in 1814, following his opponents' sudden move into Paris—"the nerve centre of the French will to resist"—when he had momentarily uncovered it in pursuit of his battle-aim. It was also suggested that the Germans' failure in 1914 might be traced to the way that, obsessed with the dream of a smashing victory in battle, they missed the opportunity to seize Paris.]

THE MEANS TO THE MORAL OBJECTIVE

After this brief historical survey, let us turn to consider the means by which the moral objective, of subduing the enemy's will to resist, can be attained. These means can be exercised in the military, the economic, the political, or the social spheres. Further, the weapons by which they are executed may be military, economic, or diplomatic—with which is included propaganda.

As war is our subject, the diplomatic and economic weapons, except in a military guise, are outside our purview. There appears little doubt, however, that the economic weapon in the struggle between rival national policies during so-called peace has possibilities still scarcely explored or understood. Again, the military weapon can be wielded in the economic sphere without any open state of war existing. In the Ruhr we saw the French aiming, by a military control of Germany's industrial resources, to subdue the latter's will to resist French policy, and with the

Aiming at the Moral Objective

further motive of a moral disruption between the German states.

What, however, are the ways in which the military weapon can be employed to subdue the enemy's will to resist *in war* ?

.

History, even Anglo-Saxon history, shows that nations bow to the inevitable, and abandon their policy rather than continue a struggle once hope has vanished. No war between civilized people has been carried, nor anywhere near carried, to the point of extermination. The living alone retain the power to admit defeat, and since wars, therefore, are ended by surrender and not by extermination, it becomes apparent that defeat is the result not of loss of life, save, at the most, indirectly and partially, but of loss of morale.

The enemy nation's will to resist is subdued by the fact, *or threat*, of making life so unpleasant and difficult for the people that they will comply with your terms rather than endure this misery. We use the words "or threat" because sometimes a nation, directly its means of resistance—its forces—were overthrown, has hastened to make peace before its territory was actually invaded. Such timely surrender is merely a recognition of the inevitable consequences.

In what ways is this pressure exerted? Partly through the stomach, partly through the pocket, and partly through the spirit. As nothing more surely undermines morale than starvation, a blockade would seem obviously the best means to gain the moral objective were it not for two grave disadvantages. First, it can only be successful where the enemy country is not self-supporting, and can be entirely surrounded—or at any rate its supplies from outside effectively intercepted. Second, it is slow to take effect, and so imposes a strain on the resources of the blockading country.

Pressure through "the pocket" can be exerted directly

The Current of War

by levies, confiscation, or seizure of customs—which require a military occupation—and indirectly by the general dislocation of business and the stoppage of the enemy's commerce. Above all, as the military forces of a modern nation are but the wheels of the car of war, dependent for their driving power on the engine—the nation's industrial resources—it follows that a breakdown in the engine or in the transmission—the means of transport and communication—will inevitably render the military forces immobile and powerless. Just as the engine and transmission of an automobile, because of the intricacy and delicacy of their joints and working parts, are far more susceptible to damage than the road wheels, so in a modern nation at war its industrial resources and communications form its Achilles' heel. Common sense should tell us that if possible these are the points at which to strike.

Pressure on "the spirit" is intimately connected with that on "the pocket," a thorough and long-continued interruption of the normal life of a nation is as depressing and demoralizing as the intimidation of the people by methods of terrorism—which, even if temporarily successful, usually react among civilized nations to the detriment of the aggressor by stimulating the will to resist or by so outraging the moral sense of other nations as to pave the way for their intervention.

.

With the growth of civilization the dislocation or control of an enemy's industrial centres and communications becomes both more effective and more easy as the means by which to subdue his will to resist.

Every modern industrial nation has its vitals; in one case it may be essential mining areas, in another manufacturing districts, a third may be dependent on overseas trade coming into its ports, a fourth so highly centralized that its capital is the real as well as the nominal heart of

Aiming at the Moral Objective

its life. In most cases there is a blend of these several factors, and in all the regular flow of transport along its arteries is a vital requirement.

.

The air has introduced a third dimension into warfare, and with the advent of the aeroplane new and boundless possibilities are introduced. Hitherto war has been a gigantic game of draughts. Now it becomes a game of halma. Aircraft enables us *to jump over* the army which shields the enemy government, industry, and people, and *so strike directly and immediately at the seat of the opposing will and policy*. A nation's nerve-system, no longer covered by the flesh of its troops, is now laid bare to attack, and, like the human nerves, the progress of civilization has rendered it far more sensitive than in earlier and more primitive times.

.

No more terrible portent for the future exists than the fact that the militarist nations are awaking to the *destructive* possibilities of the new weapons, while the Anglo-Saxon peoples, who are the leaders of *constructive* human progress, and hence might be expected to take longer views, refuse to think or talk about the subject, either from war-weariness or natural antipathy to war. Like the legendary ostrich burying its head in the sand, they seemingly hope to escape the danger by shutting it out of sight.

Absorbed in building the Temple of Peace, they neglect to take into account the stresses and strains the edifice may have to bear—and then, as before in history, are surprised when their plaster and stucco temple collapses under the rude blast of international storms.

ARE ARMIES AND NAVIES OBSOLETE ?

In view of the transcendent value of aircraft as a means of subduing the enemy will to resist, by striking at the

The Current of War

moral objective, the question may well be asked : Is the air the sole medium of future warfare ?

.

Though, in Europe, an air blow could be decisive, its achievement would probably depend on one side being superior in the air, either in numbers of aircraft or by the possession of some surprise device. Where air equality existed between the rival nations, and each was as industrially and politically vulnerable, it is possible that either would hesitate to employ the air attack for fear of instant retaliation.

A boxer with a punch in either fist enjoys both a moral and a physical advantage, and the same is true of a nation that, if its initial air blow is frustrated or is lacking in the necessary margin of superiority, can bring another weapon into play.

This truth is but the translation into future grand strategy of the immemorial key to victory used by the Great Captain of War—*striking at the enemy from two directions simultaneously*, so that in trying to parry the one blow he exposes himself to the other.

Nevertheless, the continuance of an alternative weapon to the aeroplane does not mean that armies, at least, will survive in their present form. An existing pattern army has as much "punch" as a stuffed bolster—size is no criterion of hitting power.

THE NAVAL WEAPON

A fleet suffers one fundamental limitation on its freedom of action—it is tied to the sea. Hence it cannot strike directly at the hostile nation. Its action is either directed against the enemy's stomach, and through that to his morale, or in conveying and serving as a floating base for troops or aircraft.

As with land warfare, the destruction of the enemy's main fleet is often spoken of as the objective, whereas in

Aiming at the Moral Objective

reality this act is but a means towards it—by the destruction of the enemy's shield the way is opened for a more effective blockade or for the landing of an army. As in land warfare, the knowledge that its coasts are thus rendered defenceless, may cause a nation to sue for peace rather than await inevitable starvation or invasion.

Just as the value of armies has been radically affected by the conquest of the air, so has that of surface fleets by the coming of that other new and three-dimensional weapon, the submarine.

The battleship retains the sovereignty of the *oceans* for some time to come at least, but in the *narrow seas* has yielded pride of place to the submarine—if the lessons of the Great War be assessed.

The vital question of the future is how this transfer of power over the narrow seas affects the international situation—particularly that of Great Britain, which is concerned with both spheres of sea-power.

Glance for a moment at a map of Europe—it will be seen that Great Britain lies like a huge breakwater across the sea approaches to northern Europe, with Ireland as a smaller breakwater across the approaches to Great Britain. We realize that, in the Great War, Germany was in the most unfavourable position possible for blockading England's sea communications, her submarines having first to get outside this breakwater through a narrow outlet sown with mines and closely watched, and on completion of this mission make the same hazardous return to their bases. No stronger proof of the potential menace of the submarine in future war can be found than that Germany, with so few submarines and despite such an immense handicap, sank 8,500,000 tons of shipping, and all but stopped the beat of Britain's heart.

The Current of War

Turn again to the Mediterranean, another long and narrow sea channel through which runs our artery with the East, and where our main naval force is now concentrated. Note that our ships, naval or mercantile, must traverse the *length* of this channel, and worse still, have to filter through a tiny hole at each end—the Straits of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal—while midway there is a narrow “waist” between Sicily and Tunis, barely ninety miles across.

.

Is it not obvious that, if in a future war any Mediterranean power was numbered among Britain's enemies, her fleet would find it difficult enough to protect itself against submarines, let alone protect merchant convoys and troop transports? When to the proved menace of submarine power is added the potential effect of aircraft attack against shipping in the narrow sea, it is time the British people awoke to the fact that, in case of such a war, the Mediterranean would be impassable, and that this important artery would have to be abandoned.¹ Thus, as a strategical asset, the Suez Canal has lost a large part of its value in face of modern naval and air development—for in such a war we should be driven to close the Mediterranean route, and divert our imperial communications round the Cape of Good Hope.

THE ARMY WEAPON

Finally, what is the future of this alternative “punch” to the air attack? No future, assuredly, unless the army limb of the body military is thoroughly overhauled and inoculated with the serum of mobility, for the present type of army is suffering from chronic rheumatoid arthritis, its joints far too stiff to deliver an effective punch.

¹ I meant—as the context shows, if not quite clearly—that the Mediterranean would have to be abandoned as a trade route, though not for operations.

Aiming at the Moral Objective

The outstanding lesson of the Great War was the powerlessness of the high commands to attain decisive successes—a condition due to three main factors. First, the unwieldy masses put into the field allowed neither opportunity nor room for manœuvre; second, these slow-moving infantry masses were too vulnerable a target to modern fire-weapons; third, their numbers imposed so great a strain on the means of supply that offensive after offensive was stultified by the breakdown of communications.

.

The rear communications of existing armies are based on railways, the advanced communications on roads, both of which have proved inadequate to stand even the *internal* strain of modern warfare. In the last war they suffered little *external* interference from enemy aircraft, but in the future this is a certainty.

.

The advent of aircraft has had another important consequence. Just as, in the wider sphere, their power to hop over a hostile army enables them to strike direct at the political and industrial centres of the nation, so in the zone of the armies has it laid bare the life-line of the hostile army itself—its communications.

The obvious antidote to this new development is to make the communications fluid instead of rigid; and by putting the supply and transport of armies on a trackless basis, we not only revive their “punch” by endowing them with mobility, but extract much of the sting from the military form of the air attack.

Turning to the second factor, that of vulnerability *in battle*, here again a new weapon has revolutionized the methods of warfare by providing soldiers with a machine-made skin to offset the deadliness of modern fire. Not that armour is a new invention, but until the advent of the tank

The Current of War

provided him with mechanical legs, man's muscle-power was insufficient to move him when enclosed in an armoured shell. Navies changed long ago from muscle-power to machine-power, alike for hitting, protection, and movement. Armies had to lag behind until the invention of the motor, because they could not ask the already over-burdened foot-soldier to carry armour—if he had been given it he could not have moved it. Now, however, that a means has been invented, is it not irrational to stand out against the lessons of national progress, to refuse to free the soldier's mind and spirit—his real military assets—from the fetters imposed by his bodily limitations?

Military conservatives are prone to talk of "Men *v.* Machines," as if they were conflicting ideals, whereas in reality neither opposition nor comparison is possible. We should not fall into the absurdity of comparing man with a locomotive, or a sculptor with his tools, and mechanical weapons are but the instruments of man's brain and spirit. The reactionary who opposes the inevitable course of evolution forgets that the question of muscle-force *versus* machine-force was settled away back in the Stone Age when the prehistoric fighting man discovered that a flint axe was a more potent weapon than his bare fist. Morale depends ultimately on confidence, and even the finest troops will lose their morale if they are reduced to the rôle of mere human stop-butts, powerless to hit back.

.

The tank has its limitations ; there are certain types of ground on which it is handicapped—hills, woods, and swamps—and certain defences against which it is helpless. By taking advantage of such partially tank-proof terrain, infantry may survive for a time. The limitations of the tank are exaggerated by the fact that its tactics have not been thought out and adapted to its qualities and limitations. Regarded as a mere prop to an arm, infantry, too helpless

Aiming at the Moral Objective

to look after itself, it has been frittered away in dribblets or under unsuitable conditions—as in the swamps of Passchendaele.

To discover its true use let me suggest an historical parallel :

The military bulwark of the Roman Empire was its legions, for six centuries the “queen of battle,” defying all efforts to oppose them by like means. On *August 9, A.D. 378*, on the plains of Adrianople, they met a new challenge—the cavalry of the Goths. “The Goths swept down on the flank of the Roman infantry, so tremendous was the impact that the legions were pushed together in helpless confusion. . . . Into this quivering mass the Goths rode, plying sword and lance against the helpless enemy.” When the sun went down that evening, it set not only on the great Roman Empire, but on the reign of infantry—the instrument and token of Roman world-power. The age of cavalry was ushered in.

Fifteen hundred years later the German Army was, in turn, the traditional symbol of military power. For four years, her machine-gunners, heirs of the Roman legionaries, defied all the efforts of orthodox tactics to overthrow them.

On *August 8, 1918*, the German infantry legions were overrun and slaughtered by the onset of the British tanks, almost as helplessly as their forerunners at Adrianople, exactly fifteen hundred and forty years before.

.

The lesson to be drawn from this historical analogy is that the tank attack is the modern substitute for the cavalry charge, the supreme value of which lay in its speed and impetus of assault, and the demoralizing effect of its furious onset. The deadliness of modern fire-weapons brought about the extinction of the cavalry charge, and with its disappearance warfare became lopsided and stagnant. The stalemates of recent campaigns are to be traced to the lack

The Current of War

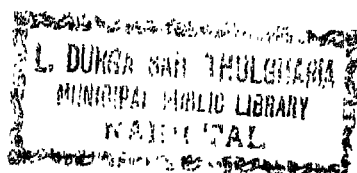
of any means of delivering and exploiting a decisive blow. If, instead of regarding cavalry as men on horseback, soldiers thought of it as *the mobile arm*, the main cause of the interminable siege warfare of the Russo-Japanese and Great Wars would be apparent. The practical view of history lies in projecting the film of the past on the blank screen of the future.

Once appreciate that tanks are not an extra arm or a mere aid to infantry, but the modern form of heavy cavalry, and their true military use is obvious—to be concentrated, and used in as large masses as possible for a decisive blow against the Achilles' heel of the enemy army: the communications and command centres which form its nerve system. Then not only may we see the rescue of mobility from the toils of trench-warfare, but with it the revival of generalship and the art of war, in contrast to its mere mechanics. Instead of machines threatening to become the masters of men, as they actually did in 1914-18, they will give man back opportunities for the use of his art and brain, and on the battlefields of the future may be expected the triumphs of an Arbela, of quality over quantity. "It is the *Man*, not men, who count in war." The tank assault of to-morrow is but the long-awaited re-birth of the cavalry charge, with the merely material changes that moving fire is added to shock, and that the armoured cavalry-tank replaces the vulnerable cavalry-horse. Thus, to paraphrase, "The cavalry is dead ! Long live the cavalry !"

The last war was the culmination of brute force ; the next will be the vindication of moral force, even in the realm of the armies.

PART II

THE SHADOW OF COMING EVENTS



CHAPTER IV

THE ARMY OF A NIGHTMARE

(THE BRITISH ARMY IN 1926)

This criticism of the Army's post-war structure, with suggestions for its remodelling, was written for *The Fighting Forces*, January, 1927. The title was inspired by Kipling's pre-Boer War story, "The Army of a Dream."

The next summer, following the entry into office of a new Chief of the Imperial General Staff, the first Experimental Mechanized Force was formed.

A NIGHTMARE is defined by the dictionaries as a dreadful dream in which the sleeper is weighed down by a sense of oppression and helplessness, and its cause is usually ascribed to the stomach being overloaded through supping "not wisely, but too well." This definition aptly describes the dominant feelings of those who study the history of the war of 1914-18—the impression of an overpowering weight of numbers under which the art of the great captains was suffocated, and the utter helplessness of the combatants to break loose from the fetters of trench warfare. In quite a different sphere and manner, the same "nightmare" sensations of oppression and helplessness have filled the minds of many who have watched or taken part in the training of the Army at home since the war.

The similarity of sensation leads one to search for the connection, for if this can be established and its cause discovered, warfare may be freed from the incubus which has clogged its course in recent generations: its old lightness and mobility restored. A survey of military history reveals

The Current of War

that mobility has yielded to stagnation whenever the means of defence have acquired a material preponderance over the means of offence. A closer analysis of the last century shows also an ever-increasing paralysis of mobility, and of generalship as an art, in proportion as armies grew larger and as the means of fire-power were developed, especially the machine-gun. It will remain one of the curiosities of history that only one student of war, a Polish banker, M. Bloch, foresaw the inevitable consequences of this drift—the trench deadlock which came about in the autumn of 1914.¹ Perhaps the reason was that most of the distinguished military students of war were so occupied in trying to discover the secret of Napoleon's system, in order to apply it on the battlefields of the future, that they forgot to keep an eye on the changes in material conditions, which would render void their application. Perhaps also the film of change passed so slowly before their faces, because of the retarding influence of conservatism, that it was not easy to realize that the picture had altered.

In *My Army Life*, Lord Dundonald recently disclosed that he was aroused in 1884 to the value of machine-guns by the direct experience of being charged by the Mahdi's spearmen at Abu Klea. And in reply to a letter of his, Colonel Knollys, a military writer of the time, says: "Machine-guns seem to be undervalued by the military authorities. . . . Lord Wolseley, I know, is personally a believer in machine-guns, or as it may be termed concentrated essence of infantry." Significant words—not only because they epitomize the value and motive of the machine-gun as we understand it to-day, but because they show the difficulty of even a great reformer—and he, moreover, with the powers

¹ It had also been foreseen by several soldiers in France, notably Captain Mayer and Colonel Grouard, who were contemporaries of Joffre and Foch. But when they pointed out the logical conclusion—that the kind of offensive which the General Staff contemplated was dangerously impracticable—they fell into disfavour, while their later writings were boycotted by the official school of thought.

The Army of a Nightmare

of a Commander-in-Chief—hastening the sluggish course of military progress. Napoleon said that “in war, it is *the man*, not men, who counts”; for a modern army we might paraphrase this by saying that “in peace, it is *the system*, not the man, who counts.” In 1884 a few enlightened thinkers could foresee that machine-guns were “concentrated essence of infantry”—exactly thirty years later we went to war with two per battalion. So little was learnt in thirty years, even though the Russo-Japanese War cast a still deeper shadow athwart the future. The Germans appreciated the lesson a fraction, no more, better than the French and ourselves, but this fraction was enough to upset the balance of warfare, and tilt it downwards to rest, and long remain, in the slough of a trench stalemate. The machine-gun’s domination of the trench battlefields of the Western Front was universally, if tardily, recognized. It is true that ultimately, when the whole manufacturing resources of nations had been devoted to the production of munitions, a tremendous artillery bombardment could sometimes quell the defending machine-guns sufficiently for the infantry to make a bound forward, at heavy cost. But the heaviest artillery bombardment could never suppress the menace—always as the barrage lifted some enemy machine-gunners would emerge from dug-outs or open fire from shell-holes, and even a solitary machine-gun would prove its power to hold up a whole infantry battalion, even a brigade. Later the tanks, when at last developed, cut a path for the infantry more economically and with better effect, but although themselves invulnerable to machine-gun fire they could not altogether crush these deadly scorpions of the battlefield, some of whom survived to take toll of the vulnerable infantry who followed the tanks. The tanks could even capture a position, but the traditional procession of infantry had to make the sacrificial offering to ensure the omens of victory.

After the war the military authorities said: “Trench warfare is finished with; we shall train for moving warfare.”

The Current of War

A most admirable sentiment—for trench warfare was inevitably the negation of generalship, the triumph of mud over mind. But as trench warfare had been created by the machine-gun and barbed wire, two paralysing agents which the tank had been developed to cure, and as tanks formed but a tiny fraction of the reconstructed armies, it is a little difficult to understand the grounds for this belief in a revival of moving warfare. So strange are the processes of thought that some of the leaders who were most anxious to restore mobility seemed also the most averse by instinct to the one means which could gratify their desire. This paradoxical attitude was even held by commanders who had stood out in the war as men possessed of the real flair of generalship, who with accustomed instruments revealed, by quick and sure action, that, like the great captains of the past they were imbued with the principle of mobility. Thus in 1925 I was told confidently that the scheme of tank-proof localities had nullified the menace of the tank—until the tanks surmounted and penetrated these chosen localities as a proof to the contrary. Then the split trail for field-guns was announced as the antidote—disillusionment came when I saw anti-tank shoots at Larkhill and found from the analysis of five separate shoots that the average was 1 hit in 22 rounds! If this was the case when firing under tranquil conditions, at one or two slow-moving and deliberately manœuvred dummy tanks, it was not difficult to estimate the decrease of effect when, as in war, the tanks' direction of approach was uncertain, when the target was a swarm of tanks in a swift nerve-shattering onrush, and when the target was simultaneously pouring a hail of fire at the gunners. In naval gunnery practice before the war about 75 per cent of hits was registered; under war conditions this fell to 2½ per cent! Such is the influence of nervous strain and other battle factors.

Later, we were told that the .5-inch machine-gun had sounded the death knell of the tank, but by the autumn,

The Army of a Nightmare

after practical test, there was a marked loss of assurance as to this latest patent remedy. This eager and ever buoyant hope for an antidote to the tank comes curiously from the lips of soldiers who sincerely desire a return to moving warfare, wherein the art of command and the keen eye for an opening can again find scope. I wonder if they realize that the discovery of an antidote must quench all chance of a renaissance of mobility and doom us to a perpetual reign of machine-made slaughter. And if so, the professional soldier will be subordinated to the "big business" organizer.

If the tank should be laid low, the machine-gun would be left undisputed master of the battlefield, and the possibility of attack decay and perish before an immovable defence. For if the vast artillery bombardments of the war could not subdue the machine-gun, there is no hope that we could succeed with our present slender scale of artillery, whose effect is still further diminished by the greater difficulties of observation and registration in open warfare as compared with the static conditions of 1914-18. Only one conclusion can be drawn from this hard fact—that with our present proportion of artillery there is no chance of infantry advancing in normal country against an enemy adequately equipped with machine-guns. The alternative is a lavish use of tanks, but here again we have not a tithe of the machines required for such a purpose, even for our small expeditionary force of four divisions. And if we had, it would be wasteful folly to expend them in bolstering up an arm which is a debit rather than an asset on the balance-sheet of battle. Infantry can no longer conquer a position defended by hostile machine-guns. They do not hold it when conquered—as our official doctrine recognizes when it lays down that the machine-guns, with the artillery, are the framework of every defensive position. If it be said that I am stretching the term "framework" beyond the meaning intended by *Field Service Regulations*, I would reply that the strength

The Current of War

of a building rests in its framework, not in the surface covering of plaster.

The effective rôle of infantry is now limited to "mopping up" the ground that the tanks have conquered, and to holding it if possible during the brief interval before the machine-guns can be brought up. And with the development of the six-wheeled carrier, even this transitory rôle disappears, for the machine-gun can be rushed forward more quickly than the infantry. True, in certain abnormal country—woods or mountains—infantry on foot are still necessary and are still an effective offensive arm when the thickness of the cover gives them a protection they otherwise lack. But such ground is only a fraction of the land surface of either Europe or Asia, and it is surely irrational to base the composition and policy of our army as a whole on the peculiar conditions of the North-West Frontier of India.

These truths were thrown into bold relief by the 1926 training season, when by far the most convincing exercises were those of the divisions where, owing to strike duty, only a single infantry brigade was available, but where the tanks, artillery, and machine-guns were on a scale hitherto employed for a whole division of three infantry brigades.

My belief is that the year 1926 will be in history a landmark in military evolution, and the cause lies in the invention of the cross-country six-wheeler. The one slender justification for preaching mobile warfare to an army with but a handful of tanks had lain in the immobility of the machine-gun. If war had broken out, there was just a chance that, if operations could be kept fluid, the hostile machine-guns might be slow in getting up or moving to cover the threatened spots on a wide front. But through the cross-country six-wheeler, the machine-gun has become mobile—and warfare, as a consequence, irredeemably static, unless and until our army is fundamentally recast.

Painful and direct experience has engraved the power of

The Army of a Nightmare

the machine-gun on the minds of soldiers, and it is easier to appreciate its effect when made mobile than it is to realize the menace of the tank, which few of our troops ever experienced as a weapon against themselves. In recent exercises, the tactical issue turned nearly always on the action of the tanks, but the lesson is still obscured by the natural pride of the other arms, by the fact that we only possess a handful of tanks, by umpiring rules which have no relation to gunnery results or war experience—if a gun gets off two rounds at a tank within 600 yards and at 6 m.p.h. the tank is put out of action ; if over 6 m.p.h. four rounds are necessary. The optimism of these rules is astonishing in the light of the anti-tank and naval gunnery statistics I have quoted earlier. Their existence, however, can still obscure the logical truths that armour plate is inherently a better protection than the human skin, that an engine is better motive power than a man's limited muscular energy, and that a mechanized "combatant" can carry an indefinitely more powerful armament than a man, who can only carry a rifle or part of a machine-gun for a short distance. But every soldier with war experience knows too well the resisting power of machine-guns ; a moment's reflection on our present artillery and tank strengths will show him the hopelessness of an infantry attack in future against a position held by machine-guns ; and the knowledge that the machine-gun has now been endowed with mobility will tell him that there is no longer a chance of finding an unguarded avenue on the hostile front which their machine-guns cannot close more quickly than our own infantry can reach it.

Let it be remembered also that the "stupendous" German machine-gun strength of the war only reached 142 guns per division at its peak, in the winter of 1917-18. It was but a third of this figure at the time of our bloody repulses on the Somme. What if the German Command, when it adopted a defensive rôle on the Western Front, had

The Current of War

been inspired with sufficient originality to convert the majority of these "defensive" divisions from an infantry to a machine-gun basis—revolution instead of slow evolution—retaining only a small proportion of light infantry in them as scouts and skirmishers. If our infantry could not break through a divisional front held by 142 machine-guns, could they ever have hoped to make an impression on a divisional front composed of 1400–2000 machine-guns? The question has only to be asked for us to realize that our constant checks would have become checkmate.

From the past let us turn to the present and future. If the machine-gun is master of the modern battlefield—in the absence of tanks—and infantry makes so limited a contribution to the military object, why do we retain 136 infantry battalions to only 4 tank battalions, 2176 infantry platoons to only 136 machine-gun platoons? Rationally, there is no answer and we stand convicted of spending some £40,000,000 a year on an army the bulk of which gives neither offensive nor defensive value in return. Practically, there are several excuses and it is just to examine them.

First, the fact that the authorities now in power are burdened with the legacy of their predecessors. I cannot feel that the historical verdict will be very favourable to those responsible for the reconstruction of the army after the war. In 1918 the experience of the combatant was dominated by the machine-gun, the tank, smoke, and gas. But the post-war builders of the army cried: "Back to 1914," and reduced to a shadow equipment and training in all these new elements. Even with the machine-gun, which could not be regarded as a trench-warfare novelty, this depreciation occurred—the Machine-gun Corps was "axed" and a mere platoon of eight guns was allotted to each battalion. The present authorities, faced with the task of restoring the true proportions, have a far greater handicap—because the opportunity of rebuilding on new foundations was lost. To modernize a structure that has once taken form

The Army of a Nightmare

is a Herculean labour under the pressure of financial stringency and vested interests.

The second excuse, in fact, is that of vested interests—in the best sense of the phrase. If we converted most of our existing regiments into tank or mobile machine-gun units, we should not only need less men, but the increased expenditure on machines would have to be met by discharging the large surplus of men in order to apply the cost of their pay to a more practical object. We can fully understand the reluctance to cause this hardship, and we know too well the clamour that always arises when the pursuit of economy, even for greater efficiency, changes from an abstract ideal to a concrete demand on the individual. But as the whole is greater than the part, is it right to keep the security of the nation in jeopardy while the soldiers affected are slowly reconciling themselves to the inevitable?

A third excuse is the rapidity of mechanical progress, whereby the latest product of to-day is obsolete to-morrow. We have marked time for eight years now, and if we are to await mechanical finality we shall wait for all eternity. If the Navy had acted on this argument it would still be equipped with the wooden sailing ships of Nelson's day. Faced with the certainty that our existing Army cannot advance against machine-guns, except under exceptional conditions, the plea of "experiment before production" rings hollow.

The best excuse, and the strongest obstacle, is the Cardwell system combined with the reluctance of the Indian authorities to accept any modern machines—whether tanks, dragons,¹ or anti-aircraft artillery. The Cardwell system,²

¹ The artillery tractor of the full-track type with bullet-proof protection was christened a "dragon," to distinguish it from the wheeled lorry used as a means of artillery traction.

² This system takes its name from Mr. Edward Cardwell, who became Secretary of State for War in 1868, and carried out a far-reaching series of army reforms. With a view to creating an adequate Army Reserve to meet a war emergency, he shortened the period of service with the colours. This step, however, complicated the problem of maintaining the strength of the battalions on foreign service—owing to the increased homeward flow of

The Current of War

which served a useful purpose in its day, is now obsolete, although venerated by many politicians who do not understand that its rules are like fetters riveted on the Army's "limbs." Although mechanical units could more effectively control the greater part of India, the Indian horizon seems to be limited to the North-West Frontier, despite the fact that any serious invasion would now assuredly come through Persia and Baluchistan, which are already practicable for the movement of a mechanized force. A way out of this impasse can only come either by a broadening of the Indian horizon or by an abandonment of the Cardwell system. It is a mockery that trained dragon-drivers, drawing tradesmen's rates of pay, should be drafted to horse-drawn units in India, there to forget their training and learn to drive horse teams, to their own discouragement and the nation's cost. While we recognize the difficulties which confront those who are responsible for the progress of the Army, and pray that they may be given strength and wisdom to attain their goal, the experience of war tells us that a clear view of the goal is an essential aid towards reaching it. Here, outside suggestions may at least help to focus the vision.

On what pattern is the Army to be recast? Like an athlete who has run to fat, it must reduce its infantry corpulence and develop its mechanized sinews. In the light of their present restricted uses we see that the proper rôle of infantry is that of land-marines; for the duties of "mopping up" and for hill and wood fighting a quarter of their present strength would be ample. The reduction would enhance

time-expired men. As a convenient solution he reorganized the infantry in regiments of two battalions; established the principle that one of these should be abroad and the other at home; and made the home battalion provide the drafts to maintain the battalion abroad. This system worked satisfactorily so long as the European armies were still based on "sabres" and "bayonets." But it later became a handicap on necessary progress, when the conditions of European warfare called for a different type of troops and equipment, while the authorities in India were still satisfied that the more primitive type suited their local problems. As the Indian Government paid for the British units serving in India, they were able to call the tune—to which, under the Cardwell System, the army at home had to conform.

The Army of a Nightmare

their usefulness, for while we could never provide the transport to mechanize the present numbers we could convey a proportion of land-marines as part of a mechanized force. At the moment we are trying to mechanize the transport of infantry in order to carry their weapons and equipment, and the sight of a string of fast cross-country motor vehicles crawling behind a 2-3 m.p.h. column on foot is as painful an anachronism as it is a pitiable waste of mobile vehicles. Nor does the harm end there, for so long as the infantry form the mass of the Army, and go on foot, so long will the Army be tied to the pace of the slowest foot-soldier.

When an employee is no longer able to perform his work it is cheaper to pension him off at once, and fill his place, than to retain him as a clog on the efficiency of others. By reducing the proportion of infantry we could not only increase our tank strength, and hence our offensive power—at present negligible—but also increase our defensive power by converting the balance of the infantry into mobile machine-gun units and land-marines. The conversion has become immediately practicable through the practical success under test of the new six-wheeler, which is essentially a commercial product and so ensures a reserve for war expansion.

Instead of creating new units it would be best simply to change the pattern of existing ones, so combining the moral asset of historic traditions with the moral and material tonic given by improved weapons. The "Die-Hards," for example, going to battle in armoured machines, would still be "Die-Hards"—but harder to kill.

Even for the proportion of infantry who are kept, as land-marines, to fight on foot, there must be a change. Not only must they be motor-moved to the scene of action—the foot-slogging soldier is as quaint a survival in the modern world as a hansom cab—but they must develop their battlefield mobility. For machine-guns, if less effective, will still be an obstacle in hilly or wooded country, and to over-

The Current of War

come them "the men who fight on foot" must become light infantry of the Peninsular type, agile groups of skirmishers who will exploit to the full the tactics of infiltration and manœuvre. When infantry are reduced to a rational proportion this high standard will become practicable, particularly if we save more time for tactical training by bringing our drill up to date—basing it on modern tactical movements instead of on those of Waterloo, as in the existing drill system.¹ What infantry lose in numbers, they will gain in status; the hollow mockery of calling them the "decisive arm" is no compensation for being treated as mere camp followers to the tanks or the artillery barrage, and to be the picked light infantry of the future mechanized army is a greater distinction than being the "cannon-fodder" mass of the present. While it is clear that the indigestible mass of infantry is the cause of our military nightmare, and equally obvious that this must be reduced, it is not so clear what diet we need for the future. The six-wheeler has proved its practical worth, and there are sure grounds for beginning at once to convert part of the infantry surplus to mobile machine-gun units on this basis.

But although this will greatly increase the defensive and delaying power of our Army, it does not solve the problem of augmenting an offensive power which at the moment is represented only by four tank battalions.

We should hasten to increase their number, but we must also recognize that the present Vickers tank is both an interim and an expensive weapon. My own view is that the course of progress will branch out from this starting-point, in two directions—to a larger tank, strongly armoured and with a heavier armament, and to a much lighter machine-

¹ Another ten years passed before a start was at last made towards modernizing the drill system. Even then, the influence of traditional forms was so strong that the proposed changes were considerably modified by the time the "new" drill was finally approved at the end of 1938. The net effect could be epitomized as three steps forward and two back. Any reader who may be interested can find a full account of this 1918-38 campaign for drill reform in Chapter XXI of *The Defence of Britain*.

The Army of a Nightmare

gun tank or car, which will gain security from its dispersion, its mobility, and the numbers which its cheapness will make possible. The first will be an artillery—or battleship—tank, and form the offensive base for the second—a cavalry, or destroyer, tank. The prototype of this second class may be the Martel-Morris tankette, or it may be a cross-country armoured car. Experiment has not yet reached the point at which we can begin equipping our forces with a standard machine, but it is urgent that we should press on the trials, for until then we must realize that the striking power of our Army is practically nil. And we must also realize that our object is not to produce a mere reconnaissance machine, but to replace the now paralysed infantry.

The French Infantry Manual of 1920 pointed the way, although the “practical” progress of the French Army since the death of General Buat has lagged behind. Red-hot from the forge of war experience, it laid down the cardinal truth that fighting strength could no longer be valued in “rifles,” but by the number of automatic weapons. Each *groupe de combat* consists of one light automatic, and the men of the group only exist in relation to that weapon, according to whether their individual rôle is “to move it, serve it, feed it, or protect it.” Under present conditions thirteen infantrymen are allotted to bring each light automatic into action, but the Commission which prepared the manual took a longer view and speculated whether “this law would lead in the future to further reducing the group, to constituting it of two or three men enclosed in an armoured and mobile shell.” The law thus enunciated illumines our path in the future. For it is obviously cheaper and more effective if a light automatic can be brought into action by two or three men in “an armoured and mobile shell” than by thirteen unprotected men on foot. Both, dismounted, have equal defensive power, but the first has great and the second no offensive power. Taking the Martel-Morris as an example, the annual cost, including depreciation, of a

The Current of War

machine with a crew of two, would be no more than that of three existing infantrymen. But whereas an existing infantry battalion of a thousand men is incapable of attack against a machine-gun defence, a battalion of three hundred two-man tanks would swamp any defensive position in moving warfare—on which basis our army is being trained.

Our expeditionary force of four divisions is essentially a striking force, only that in reality it has no striking force except against ill-armed or savage foes. Its purpose in case of another large-scale war is, as in the past, to strike a rapid blow in aid of our Allies while we are expanding the national forces at home. If our Allies of 1914 regarded the six divisions of the British Expeditionary Force as a mere drop in the bucket, what value can they attach to the four present divisions of infantry in these days when the machine-gun dominates the battlefield? With them man-power is cheap, but mechanization expensive. With our highly paid professional army, the conditions are reversed. A wholly mechanized expeditionary force of the same cost would be not merely a valuable, but probably a decisive reinforcement in any struggle between the conscript armies of other powers. And because of this, we should be an immense asset towards European peace, by discouraging the zest for war of any foreign Power.

The ultimate consequence is still more far-reaching. The production of such an "armoured and mobile shell" will cause another revolution of the wheel of progress. For as the infantry disappear before the present machine-gun, so will this lose its own target and value; but remaining a target for its own enemy, the tank, it must disappear—or, acquiring armoured protection, become a form of tank. Thus the result of the triumph of the machine-gun is to hasten the coming of tank armies. Improving upon the legendary phoenix, a newborn offensive power is rising from the ashes of the defensive overlord of the battlefield.

CHAPTER V

THE FRENCH ARMY

(A CRITICISM, A FORECAST, AND A SUGGESTION—IN 1926)

In the autumn of 1926, through the courtesy of the French military authorities, I was able to visit some of the training centres of their Army, thus renewing an earlier acquaintance with it which had been marked some years previously by a request that I would furnish a critique of the doctrines in their original post-war manuals. As a result of my observation during this tour, I wrote a series of articles entitled "The French Army to-day," which were published in the *Daily Telegraph* in January, 1927.

The main conclusions are here reprinted—omitting the purely descriptive parts and comments on the detailed training.

IF to know your goal is a good step towards attaining it, the French Army is more fortunate than the British, which, except during the decade preceding 1914, has been treated as a general handy-man, with any and every part of the world as its possible theatre of war, and hence no clear-cut purpose for which it can be trained nor policy on which it can be organized. The French Army to-day, as for half a century past, has its face turned towards the Rhine, with disquieting assurance, yet without trepidation, that there lies the foe of to-morrow, as of yesterday. To prepare itself to withstand the fresh trial of strength, of which instinct and historical reasoning warn it, is the keynote of French military policy. To grasp this is essential to the understanding of the doctrine on which the Army is being trained. I would make it clear that the reference is purely to the technical sphere, and not to the political; it does not mean that the French have any desire, or even

The Current of War

willingness, for such a renewed trial. Indeed, I am convinced that they are essentially unmilitaristic, that they have no wish to don Germany's cast and threadbare mantle of military ambition, and that sheer distaste for war is the motive underlying all their repressive and defensive measures.

With this preface, one may continue, and say that, from the point of view of French military tactics and organization, November 11, 1918, was simply a break in a serial, "to be continued in our next." Their horizon is bounded by the armaments and conditions of the Western Front in 1918. Herein lies the clue to their extreme emphasis on fire-power, which leads their official regulations to declare that "of the two elements, fire and movement . . . fire is preponderant." And in their tactics all else is subordinated to the production of an overwhelming volume of fire. Their infantry division, and regiment, are still the profusely armed but complex organs of practically war-time pattern. Their exercises, large or small, are normally designed to bring out the action of a unit *encadré*—that is, with other units on either side limiting its frontage, and hence its possibility of manœuvre. In brief, they are aiming, consciously or unconsciously, at the production of a powerful but rigid fighting machine, rather than a flexible instrument which will give scope for the gifts of an artist of war.

.

The French tactical methods are likewise influenced by their dictum that fire-power is the preponderant factor and by the memory of the strictly defined frontages of 1918.

The outcome of such a blend is to subordinate the idea of manœuvre to that of building up a moving wall of fire—"the offensive power of the unit is always maintained by the gradual fusion of the reserve into the echelon of fire." This doctrine of more or less direct reinforcement, rather than outflanking manœuvre, leads in turn to their con-

The French Army

ception of future battle as a preliminary fighting approach which will gain a jumping-off position for a deliberately prepared assault against the enemy's main resistance. Similarly, whereas our manual suggests 1500-1000 yards as the frontage of a battalion in attack, the French is from 800 down to as narrow as 300 metres. Such narrow frontages may in theory ensure the dense volume of fire on which the French pin their faith, but in practice it would seem to expose such thick numbers in the fire-swept zone as perhaps, through increased casualties, to nullify its own purpose. I cannot quite see how the French, a people renowned for their logical thought, can reconcile these frontages with their arguments for a lavish use of material in order to economize in men.

In defence, also, the French infantry lay the major stress on the organization of a network of static fire positions, even regarding as normal the reinforcement of these by the reserves, and they place far less reliance on mobile counter-attacks than do either ourselves or the Germans.

.

Next to, or rather with, the infantry must be considered the tanks—for in the French Army they do not form a separate arm, but are treated as a sub-division of the infantry. Here, again, the main cause appears to be the persistent influence of 1918, if partly also due to the fact that their standard machine is still the slow-moving Renault-like tank of the war. From its inherent limitations springs the official doctrine that "tanks are incapable of carrying on the fight by themselves. But they form an extremely precious and powerful reinforcement for the infantry. . . ."

The French tanks are, in fact, armoured infantry "pill-boxes" put on tracks, and so endowed with the power of movement at a foot-soldier's pace.

.

The Current of War

The phrase "extremely precious," quoted above, seems in practice to be interpreted as meaning that the tanks are so precious that they must be hoarded until the infantry have reached the end of their tether. This may prove false economy, for "man is the most costly article in war."

.

With such emphasis on fire-power and so marked the stamp of war-time impressions, it is natural that the artillery should have perhaps a paramount place in the French doctrine. They may do homage to the infantry, but their truer respect is for the artillery, which in their minds, if not in their words, is the decisive arm. It is cast, indeed, for a dual decisive rôle ; for not only is the effectiveness of the fire of the "direct support" artillery the condition which governs the possibility of the infantry assault, but it is by the concentrated use of a large artillery mass that the commander aims, in reality, to deliver the decisive blow. I trust to interpret correctly the underlying idea of the French if I say that this artillery mass is to be the modern form of Napoleon's Old Guard.

.

What picture emerges from the doctrine which we have traced? That the French have created an army which forms a large and powerful, but slow-moving, steam-roller of fire which is designed to push back gradually, as in 1918, any similar army which is aligned against it. In basing their doctrine on 1918, the French have undoubtedly a sound historical justification. For, as they point out, their doctrine of 1875, after the Franco-German War, was far more true to the reality of 1914 than any of those which succeeded it, each tending to rely more and more upon man rather than upon his weapons ; upon his courage and numbers, without sufficient care to safeguard these qualities against the rude shocks of battle.

But if 1914 proved again the truth of deductions drawn

The French Army

from the battlefield experience of 1870, we must also remember that the foe of 1914 had continued his organization and methods on the same lines as in 1870.

What will happen if the foe of to-morrow, although the same in race, has entirely changed his "character"? Is not the structure of the French Army thereby undermined because it has been built on sands which have shifted instead of upon solid rock?

.

How will the French steam-roller fare if its enemy declines to roll ponderously against it, and instead, barring large areas with gas, concentrates its highly trained forces for mobile thrusts aimed to dislocate the complex French war-machine? It is paradoxical that the French and Germans should have exchanged doctrines, in essence at least, the Germans embodying the Napoleonic tradition of mobility and surprise, while the French forsake their historic *élan* and swift manœuvres in their devotion to fire-power.

Viewing the French organization in the light of their doctrine, we gain the impression of a machine in which the tremendous fire-power given by automatic weapons has been developed without adequate attention to its power of movement—like fitting a petrol-motor to an ox-wagon—and as such automatic weapons are essentially defensive, it is difficult to see this machine driving home an offensive punch against an evasive foe, whose small but mobile strength offers little target and facilitates counter-thrusts. Will the battlefields of to-morrow see another conflict between David and Goliath?

.

Having pictured the French Army as it is to-day in body, thought, and training, can we gaze into the crystal and foretell its future? We have seen it as an army strong in numbers, if less than before the war, and stronger still in fire-power. But has it taken any effective steps to ensure

The Current of War

that the advance in the means of movement and of protection keep pace? It has forty-four battalions of light tanks, and two of heavy tanks to our four. But although the French have nearly 3000 machines, they are all of war-time pattern, their speed no faster than the man on foot, and their very imperfections have tended to narrow the French military horizon.

.

From the machines we pass to the men. The doctrine and organization of the French Army cannot fail to influence the subject of man-power, while the method of recruitment in turn reacts upon the functioning of the Army in a future war. As is well known, the term of service is to be reduced from eighteen to twelve months, and as this far-reaching change must have a profound influence on national security it has led to a thorough reorganization scheme.

(The provisions of the scheme were then summarized.)

In order to ensure the maximum of training during the reduced period of service the police, office, and barrack duties are to be carried out by engaging 14,000 civilian employees and 15,000 special *agents militaires* for work in the new *Centres de Mobilisation*. In addition 29,000 re-engaged N.C.O.s and men are wanted to strengthen the instructional cadres, raising the personnel of these to 105,000.

.

From these details it is clear that success in laying the foundations even of the new scheme depends on obtaining the 58,000 re-engagements and civilians, and the prospect does not seem very hopeful unless the pay is raised and conditions of service made more attractive. Money, indeed, is the rock on which not only the new scheme, but the military strength of France, may founder. The pay of the officers is deplorably low, inadequate even for bare existence, and the rise granted early in 1920 was far too small to counteract the vast increase in the cost of living and

The French Army

depreciation of the franc. A captain receives only 1500 francs a month, a commandant 2000—the rough equivalent of £140 and £180 a year respectively. Unlike our own Army, few of the officers outside the cavalry have any private means at all, and the natural consequence is that they are reduced to living under conditions which a British working-man would reject. I have heard of whole families living in a couple of rooms in a back street, and of officers who could hardly carry on their duties for want of sufficient food. Such conditions would demoralize the finest army, and if there are now signs of this ill-effect, the one cause for surprise is that self-sacrificing devotion and *esprit de corps* could have checked it so long. The tenacity of spirit of the French officers under such conditions is almost as heroic as their conduct in the war.

But its evil effect must be even more in the future than in the present. The senior officers, men of fine stamp, are too old to change their profession, even if their spirit permitted; but their quality is not being replaced. Junior officers of a sort will still come in, because education at the military colleges is free, and because there is still a social prestige in being an officer which attracts classes who formerly could not aspire to it. But unless France entirely remodels her army and its conditions, I fear for her real security when this fine type of present senior officer has died out.

Her doctrine of fire-power and complex tactical organization of the 1918 pattern are themselves handicapped by the difficulty of obtaining efficient and sufficiently numerous instructors, which in turn reacts upon the shortened period of service. The more technical arms are already suffering because eighteen months is found so short for such training, and the reduction to a year makes the situation more ominous. It is little use building a doctrine of war upon the overwhelming effects of an intricate production of fire, if one cannot rely upon this fire for hitting its target.

The Current of War

Inadequate training must cause still more friction in a war machine which, as my earlier remarks have suggested, has developed its fire-power without equal attention to its protected mobility. Under the test of a future war the ponderous advance of such a machine might break down altogether.

The one element which may modify the conclusions we have drawn is the French air arm, the strongest in the world—although here again quantity is obtained partly at the expense of new equipment.¹ It may be even true that in the French air arm rests almost entirely the effective power of the French Army to press an offensive and impose its will on the enemy, otherwise made secure by the defensive preponderance of land armaments to-day.

To sum up the situation as a whole—I feel that France militarily stands at the parting of the ways. If she continues on her present course, her Army will become a national militia, growing ever less effective owing to lack of modern equipment and lack of expert instructors, as her old type of professional officers, devoted and highly educated, drop out from lack of adequate pay and prospects.

What is the alternative course? My own conviction is that a smaller professional army, well paid, highly trained, and mechanized, would by its quality give France more real security than her present quantity affords. I would go further, and say that, far from being a militarist menace, as is the delusion of ignorant foreign pacifists, France to-day has hardly adequate cover in her military insurance policy, and this security is shrinking to danger-point. The situation is serious because a secure and strong France is essential to the stability of European peace.

¹ In the years that followed, the failure to maintain an adequate flow of equipment led to the shrinking, in turn, of the quantitative scale of the French Air Force—since a decreasing proportion of its machines were fit to take the air in a modern war. In 1940 its strength on paper was perilously low, but its effective strength was, tragically, much less.

The French Army

I know well that the suggestion of changing to a professional army has little hope of acceptance in France, where the fear of a military dictatorship is a political obsession, and where the belief that a conscript army is necessarily a cheap military insurance has a deeply rooted hold on the public mind.

But France has been such a pioneer in mechanical development, and mechanization has such obvious advantages and so few drawbacks for a country whose military problem is primarily European, that she will surely awaken to the fact that here lies the science-sent means to offset her declining population and to buttress her military position by a revival in modern form of that mobility which has been her tradition and her spirit. For in the mobility of her forces she found of old the secret of her greatest successes, and it is essentially suited to the temperament of her people.

Thus, even if her Government shrink from a complete change, it may be that, realizing the precipice to which the present path is trending, they will seek a compromise solution, and cut down mere quantity in order to afford the cost of converting part of their present forces into a mechanical striking force of highly trained long-service volunteers, to form a spearhead to the national Army, which could be expanded and developed after the outbreak of war.

This suggestion roused both interest and controversy in France, and I was informed that Marshal Pétain, then Commander-in-Chief designate of the French Army, had caused the article to be officially circulated. At that time Captain de Gaulle was a member of Marshal Pétain's personal staff. Seven years later he developed the same theme at length as the keynote of his book, in 1934, *Vers l'Armée de Metier* (since published in English under the title *The Army of the Future*). And in 1937 M. Paul Reynaud expounded the same idea—the creation of a professional mechanized striking force—with still more urgency, in his pamphlet *Le Problème Militaire Français*.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW BRITISH DOCTRINE OF MECHANIZED WAR (1929)

The measure of progress made since the first mechanized force had been launched, in 1927, was described and discussed in the following article which appeared, under the above title, in *The English Review* for December, 1929.

It provides an historical outline of the evolution of mechanized warfare during the first decade after the World War. And it serves, incidentally, as a reminder how far the technique which the Germans applied so strikingly in May, 1940, had been developed in this country more than ten years earlier.

THIS year the War Office raised a landmark in the history of armies by issuing the first official manual of mechanized war. Colloquially, it has been christened the "Purple Book," a title which refers to the colour of its covers and not to the presence of any "purple patches" inside them. For however futuristic the subject, it is treated with the sombre reserve, and in the rather cloudy language, which always characterize an official manual. Hence, to appreciate the full import of this potentially epoch-making new doctrine, one must be able "to read between the lines," and interpret their meaning in simple unofficial language.

But even to make the interpretation clear one must understand, first, the psychological, and second, the mechanical conditions which have shaped this doctrine. The former can best be traced through a brief historical outline of the growth of ideas during and since the war, and of their struggle for acceptance.

The New British Doctrine of Mechanized War

In the generation before 1914 the military thought of Europe was divided into two schools, one large and the other very small. The first, obsessed by hero-worship of Napoleon and drawing false conclusions from easy victories of the Germans in 1866 and 1870 over the effete professional armies, had a blind faith in the virtue of the massed attack to obtain an early and decisive victory. This school gained control of the European General Staffs and the few dubious realists were excommunicated.

The other school found its foremost prophet in the Polish banker, M. Bloch of Warsaw, who analysed the improved range and deadliness of modern weapons and predicted that war would soon develop into a deadlock, with the opposing armies passively entrenched. His was a voice crying in the wilderness—the wilderness of professional military ritual which suffocates common sense.

Then war came, and within two months his prediction had proved right. Although all armies had neglected the machine-gun, the comparatively few of these weapons that were available sufficed to turn the charging lines of infantry into swathes of corpses. Flesh and blood could not stand against this grim Reaper, and the common sense of the soldiers, revolting from the common non-sense of military doctrine, led them to dig themselves in the ground before they were buried in it. A trench was at least preferable to a certain grave.

The lesson might have been learnt beforehand if the generals of Europe had studied the American Civil War intelligently. Therein trenches had followed on the heels of an improvement in firearms far less marked than that which occurred between 1865 and 1914. And in its later stages the war-experienced troops had only attacked wholeheartedly when wise generalship guaranteed them a reasonable chance of success.

But in 1914 the military leaders were extraordinarily slow to realize the resisting power of entrenched machine-guns

The Current of War

and barbed wire. And equally slow to lose their faith in the power of numbers—of human tonnage. Fortunately or unfortunately, the infantry masses of Europe were more docile in sacrifice than the intelligent and independent American citizens of half a century earlier. Not more brave, they had less aptitude in avoiding the grave. In consequence, the Grand Duke Nicholas and his successor were able to sacrifice myriads before the Russian peasant at last revolted. Joffre, Foch, and Nivelle were able to use up the best manhood of France before the mutinies of 1917 brought this policy to a close—and caused a natural reaction to the other extreme. From July, 1916, onwards the British Army in turn poured out its vain libation of blood, leaving it physically and to some extent morally impoverished to resist the German spring offensive of 1918. Great as was the recovery of the autumn, and ripened though its skill, it never regained the spirit of the Army, the first national Army, which went forward so trustingly in 1916 to its first great test.

But if the stock military leaders of Britain were little wiser than their Continental compeers, the mind of the country behind them was less deadened by military ritual. As early as October, 1914, several men in high position realized both the completeness and the cause of the deadlock. One was Mr. Churchill and another Sir Maurice Hankey, who had both enjoyed sufficient military experience to illumine, and not enough to cramp, their thought. At General Headquarters in France there was a third in Colonel Swinton, the soldier-novelist, who, as historian of the Russo-Japanese War, had, almost alone, appreciated its warning.

These men between them, with the aid of technical brains, brought about the tank as an antidote to machine-guns and barbed wire. Although hampered and opposed by military conservatism, and immature in design, the new armour-carrying machine proved its power. By German

The New British Doctrine of Mechanized War

confession it was the decisive military factor in the tide-turning battles of July and August, 1918.

These war-time tanks were slow, and this condition determined the way they were used. As their speed was roughly a man's walking pace, it was natural to use them as armoured "companions" to the infantry. Crawling just ahead of the infantry, they crushed the man-killing machine-guns which were the deadly foes of the infantry. And the infantry, in turn, were close enough to help in protecting the tank against its own special foe, the field-gun.

Between the practice of the various armies there was little difference, except that the British tanks were "big brothers," and the French tanks "little brothers." The Germans never developed them, for Ludendorff did not put tanks in the "urgent" class of war material until the "black day"—August 8, 1918—had sealed the doom of his own and his country's fortunes.

But the early end of the war nearly spelt the end of the tank in the land of its birth. The Tank Corps was hurriedly reduced, experiments "axed," and thought discouraged. If this was mainly due to the typical reaction of peace, it was also prompted in part by a worthy motive. For soldiers realized the futility and ruinous cost of the long trench deadlock, and their one desire was to revive the prospect of moving warfare—should war come again. As the tank had been invented to cure the trench deadlock, it was viewed as a purely trench-warfare phenomenon, and opinion assigned it no part in the moving warfare of the future.

But moving warfare could not be revived merely by Couéism. To a realist there seemed even less chance of it than in 1914, for machine-guns were far more numerous and infantry just as vulnerable. Hence any war must soon become a trench war unless something could keep it fluid and prevent a crust hardening.

While the majority of soldiers were content to believe that moving warfare would become possible as soon as the

The Current of War

last war was forgotten and the world had been made safe for the Regular Army, the war had at least generated fresh thought in two directions.

One school concentrated on an attempt to see if the development of infantry tactics could provide a means to pierce the machine-gun web and the trench crust. At its head was General Maxse, who had reorganized the training of the British Armies after the disasters of March, 1918, and in time for the victory offensive of the autumn. Through him I was called in after the Armistice to rewrite the official infantry doctrine, and I recast it on the basis of the infiltration method which the Germans had used at Caporetto and in their successive "breaks-through" of 1918. The improvements of detail are too technical for discussion here, but the underlying principle was that instead of attacking the key positions of the enemy directly, and piling up hecatombs of dead in front of them, they were taken indirectly—by pushing past their flanks and straight on, leaving them to be dealt with subsequently when weakened by the moral effect of isolation. This principle was taken from Nature itself, for thus does any torrent or stream take the line of least resistance, first finding a way past an obstacle and then washing away the obstacle by its back eddies, while the head of the stream is flowing on and broadening out afresh.¹

In face of strong, and often abusive, opposition the new doctrine gained acceptance, and its formerly controversial points are now commonplace. So commonplace that after ten years of peace-time practice they had become overgrown with the ivy of formalism which is deadening the real life-saving idea of these tactics. I am still confident that in rough and wooded country infantry rightly trained and intelligent might be able to pierce the network of enemy machine-guns. But I am losing faith in the possibility of producing such infantry from the low-grade personnel who

¹ This "expanding torrent" method of attack was later applied in the new tank tactics. Because of the tank's combination of speed with armour it was ideally suited for the execution of such a method.

The New British Doctrine of Mechanized War

are drawn into the ranks in peace-time, and whose prospect of developing tactical initiative is lessened by the deadening effect of barrack-square drill and the "nursery" restrictions which unreflecting martinets regard as essential for discipline.

The other original post-war school was a school of one—of one voice, at least. It belonged to Colonel J. F. C. Fuller, who, as war Chief of Staff in the Tank Corps, had originated the great surprise of Cambrai, November, 1917, when nearly four hundred tanks were suddenly released to overwhelm the Hindenburg line and its defenders, in place of putting them on their guard by the customary artillery bombardment of several days' duration. Now he began to preach the gospel of sea warfare on land, declaring that the tank marked a new epoch in land warfare, just as the *Merrimac* and *Monitor* had at sea; that in armour lay the means of salvation against machine-guns and so against the recurrence of trench warfare. He prophesied and advocated the complete mechanization of armies, and proclaimed the abdication of infantry—the former "queen of battles."

At first he was contemptuously dismissed as a mere crank and made few converts. Perhaps I was one of the earliest—at least in open acceptance. Constant debate between us had drawn me over to his side and, somewhat ironically, the final stage of my conversion came when, as a presumed authority on infantry, I was asked to expound the case against mechanization. The best arguments I could find failed to convince one reader—myself.

Henceforth I joined with "Boney" Fuller in leading the advocacy of mechanization, and the fact of my "infantry" predilection being known may have added some value to the reinforcement. The campaign for the new infantry doctrine was complete; the campaign for a doctrine of mechanized warfare now developed.

Coincidentally with this came a technical development in tanks themselves which had an important influence on this

The Current of War

doctrine. From 1923 onwards the old heavy war-time machines began to be replaced by lighter and much faster machines with sprung tracks, weighing only eleven tons instead of thirty, and capable of over 20 m.p.h. instead of barely 4-5. Even the "rule-of-thumb" soldier saw that to tie these closely to the service of 2-3 m.p.h. infantry was manifestly absurd. But the student of history who was also a student of mechanical warfare could draw a more far-reaching deduction. The combination of historical sense with logical vision revealed to him that the new fast tanks were the heirs of the medieval knights who for a thousand years had dominated the realm of warfare and, by their armoured mobility, had confined infantry to the mountains and to the fortresses.

Gunpowder and his own stupidity had finally deprived the mounted mail-clad knight of his paramount position, but even then cavalry—the mobile arm—had continued to be the decisive instrument of the great captains. When the development of the breech-loading rifle, and then of the machine-gun, sounded the knell of cavalry, warfare became stagnant and indecisive—because generals were left without any arm capable of rapid manœuvre or of exploiting an opening on the battlefield.

But the fast cross-country armoured fighting vehicle promised to revive the protected mobility in which had lain the power of mail-clad cavalry, and so to release generalship from its bullet-forged fetters. Thanks to the scientists, war might once more offer scope for the artist and for rapid decisions instead of a long drawn-out war of trenches. This idea became the new keynote of the advocates of mechanization. For ordinary soldiers it was an idea more easily grasped and more appealing than that of sea warfare on land, and gradually, by constant reiteration, it permeated their minds. The new tanks helped the argument by the mental and moral impression which their terrifying speed created.

The New British Doctrine of Mechanized War

In 1925 and 1926 the trickle of converts suddenly swelled into a torrent. There is always a danger in sudden conversion, for new converts have rarely thought out the foundations of their faith, and so are apt to pervert it. This was to prove no exception. But the theoretical recognition of the new gospel was assured with the appointment of a new chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir George Milne. He had been almost the first among the senior generals to perceive the potentialities of mechanization, and his receptiveness of mind was the more notable in view of two factors—that he was close on sixty and a Scot, two factors which imply an extremely cautious outlook. The subsequent history of mechanization in the British Army has been largely determined by the counterpull exerted, on the one hand, by his progressive thought and, on the other, by his instinctive caution.

In 1927 the hopes and pleas of the mechanical warfare advocates were met by the creation of an experimental mechanized force, later rechristened "The Armoured Force." Unhappily, both in direction and equipment, it was a makeshift and a mixture—of old and new. If its first season's trials taught few lessons that we could not deduce by simple reasoning beforehand, and obscured other logical truths through faulty handling, the disappointment was compensated and the faults were corrected by an address from the C.I.G.S. which put the experiment back, in theory at least, on the right lines.

Expectations, however, were again disappointed when 1928 saw no change in the composition and equipment of the force. And once more it was used in bull-headed direct assaults against strong positions, whereby its mobility and surprise value were forfeited. No useful lessons could thus be gleaned, except the negative ones of how not to use it.

But with the spring of this year, fresh compensation came with the issue of the new War Office manual, embodying

The Current of War

the doctrine of mechanized war thus authoritatively accepted. The advocates of mechanization could at last feel that their case was lifted out of the arena of controversy, and their ten years' campaign sealed with success. It now remains for practice to fulfil theory, for equipment to catch up doctrine. Logically, this should be effected by a speedy conversion of the army and its training from a muscular to a mechanized basis, though unfortunately in army affairs logical deduction rarely merges into logical execution. And the pace of both practice and equipment, at present depressingly slow, suffers extra handicaps in financial stringency, lack of political interest in army reform, and slow promotion—which delays the rise to power of the generation of soldiers who, by direct experience, have learnt the futility of "muscular Martianity." Nor do these exhaust the list. The wave of idealistic pacificism which has submerged this country—without, however, lapping the borders of the rest of Europe—is a psychological handicap. For the soldier, sensitive to it, hesitates to embark upon the necessary reorganization of the Army through fear that, when he has cut away the dead branches, a political frost will nip the new shoots. His attitude may be short-sighted, for the risk of too small an army is less than that of too dead an army, but it is human.

Here, however, we are concerned with doctrine and not with equipment, except in one way—the influence of mechanical conditions upon the form of the new doctrine. For just as it received a great impulse from the introduction in 1923-24 of the first Vickers tank (now called the "Medium" tank), so fresh inventions have helped to mould its outline. Technical design has, indeed, made great strides in these past few years. Not so much from direct War Department research, which has been hampered by its small scale, and by frequent diversion of energy on "white elephant" experiments initiated by senior officers who have not properly thought out the question of

The New British Doctrine of Mechanized War

mechanical warfare. But private or ordinary service engineers have been fertile in ideas.

The first was the invention of a one-man tank by Major G. Le Q. Martel. This first "baby" machine was built as a spare-time hobby in his private garage and used to be left outside his front door at night like a mechanical watch-dog. Martel argued that, as an air pilot could fly his machine and fire his machine-gun simultaneously, so could a tank driver, and he proved his case. But the authorities, arguing that the average tank driver would not be a Martel, demanded a two-man machine. A civilian engineer produced such a machine to carry two while being even smaller and lower, and hence offering less target than the original one-man tank. This new Carden-Loyd machine of 1926 was originally a wheel-cum-track vehicle, with a speed of 30 m.p.h. on its wheels and about half that speed on its tracks. Since then its design has been so improved that the wheels have been abandoned, while its maximum speed is as high on tracks as it was on wheels. This summer some 250 of these Carden-Loyds (fitted with Ford engines) were issued to the troops, part of them being used as light tanks and part as armoured machine-gun carriers for the infantry. Meantime an improved Carden-Loyd light tank has been designed—with thicker armour and more powerful motor, slightly larger, and considerably faster—and is under trial.

As the invention of the first fast medium tanks portended the revival of cavalry's old decisive rôle, so the "baby" tank promises not only to amplify this rôle, but to replace infantry except in very wooded or mountainous country. It may be regarded as a revival of the old dragoons or mounted infantry, with the additional advantage of armour, so that it can not only move swiftly from point to point like its horsed forerunners, but can preserve and use this mobility on the battlefield.

To realize its advantages let us compare it with the present infantryman. To close with his opponent he may

The Current of War

often have to cross a space of a mile under machine-gun fire and rifle fire. Hampered by his equipment and the need of stopping to fire, he can rarely hope to traverse this space in less than half an hour, and often longer. And all the time his body is exposed to bullets, unless the ground is very broken or wooded. In contrast, the "light tankman" can be across and on top of his foe within five or six minutes. During this short exposure his body is protected by armour against bullets, except armour-piercing bullets fired by a special weapon. Moreover, he can fire as he moves, and although his "moving" fire may not be accurately aimed, it will create a "hail-storm" of bullets most disturbing to his opponent's accuracy of aim.

Compared with the larger tank, the "baby's" advantage lies in its smallness and invisibility. This advantage is multiplied by numbers, which is the old infantry principle—in a new form—of dispersion to avoid enemy fire. These numbers are the best safeguard against the special anti-tank weapons which an enemy may possess, and are made possible by the relative cheapness of the tank.

The other noteworthy mechanical "birth" of the past few years has been that of the six-wheeler, produced by the engineers of the Royal Army Service Corps. As a reward for their efforts they were speedily deprived of the opportunity for further research—which, in a redistribution of duties, was transferred to a less mechanically experienced branch of the service. But this was too late to mar their offspring, which had matured so rapidly that within a brief time it was being manufactured by numerous civil motor firms for commercial as well as military use. In the Dominions especially, where roads are scarce and bad, such a vehicle has wide scope as a freight-carrier and so promises a civil reserve for conversion to military use in case of war. The six-wheeler, if not so good across country and trenches as a whole-track machine, has proved superior to the half-track and still more to any four-wheeled vehicle—even the

The New British Doctrine of Mechanized War

Ford ! If the Ford could carry British troops across the uplands of Persia to the Caspian, and carry the Roy Chapman Andrews expedition across Mongolia, few arcs should defeat the six-wheeler. And it has already proved its capacity and endurance in severe tests on the wild North-West Frontier of India.

As a fighting vehicle, its lesser cross-country power and its vulnerable tyres handicap it in comparison with the tank, although it profits from a higher road speed and less wear and tear. Nevertheless, the latest armoured-cars are being made of this type, and in such a rôle the six-wheeler has wide scope. On the other hand, it is being relieved of its 1927 functions as a machine-gun carrier by the Carden-Loyd, which is a much smaller target and easier to armour.

But for all transport purposes the six-wheeler is recognized as the standard type of the future, and as an artillery tractor it is more efficient and more economical as well as more mobile than the horse team. This year nearly all the Territorial artillery went to camp with six-wheelers instead of horses, and in consequence these citizen artillerymen have been able to spend most of their time in gunnery training instead of in trying, with much sweat and cursing, to train their obstinate horse teams.

I have now outlined the mechanical foundation on which the new doctrine of war has been built up. As a prologue to the doctrine itself, two highly significant changes were made in the old "general" manual—*Field Service Regulations*. The sentence, "Infantry is the arm which in the end wins battles," was cut out, and infantry were deprived of the empty compliment of calling them "the decisive arm." Since 1914 its absurdity had been apparent to any logical thinker and now this was at last recognized by authority.

The new manual goes still further towards realism by declaring that the "machine-gun, in the hands of the enemy, makes open ground virtually impossible in daylight

The Current of War

to attacking infantry, and immobilizes them unless they are supported by an overwhelming artillery concentration. . . ." This statement meets the arguments which have been continually on the lips of the reformers, and the qualifying "unless" means nothing—as no nation could hope to provide sufficient shells for such a bombardment until its munition factories had enjoyed a year of war-time expansion. Even then, such a bombardment, as the last war proved, frustrates its own purpose by putting the enemy on the alert and by making the ground impassable.

In contrast, the new manual declares that the mobility of armoured fighting vehicles (called A.F.V.s for short) "in formed bodies is at least double that of infantry formations and is likely to increase. Their power of endurance is much greater and they are less vulnerable to air and gas attack." It then emphasizes their "moral and material effect" on other troops and says, "They can, in fact, render immobile, by threat alone," old-style infantry formations. And it forecasts strategic moves of as much as 100 miles a day by mechanized forces.

In the new organization the brigade supersedes the large and clumsy division as the basic higher formation, and each brigade is to consist of units similar in characteristics. This concedes another point of the reformers. For the original mechanized force was an unmanageable mixture of tanks, self-propelled guns, tractor-drawn guns, unarmoured machine-guns, and infantry in open motor-trucks, which hindered each other more than they helped. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that the U.S. experimental force, formed a year after ours, not only failed to profit by the British mistake but increased the illogical mixture of types.¹

¹ When the French and German Armies, some five years later, began to create mechanized divisions they both repeated the same mixture. By incorporating an excessive proportion of merely motorized infantry and artillery, they made their new-style divisions clumsy to handle and vulnerable to attack, especially from the air. In practice, however, the Germans seem to have modified their pattern increasingly as they gained in experience. Thus the force which penetrated the Somme front last June in their second

The New British Doctrine of Mechanized War

In future, the new British formations will be either light or medium armoured brigades. A "light" brigade will comprise simply two or three battalions of light tanks and a battery of close support tanks—omitting ordinary artillery—with the possible addition of an armoured-car regiment. Two regular cavalry regiments have already been converted into armoured cars.

A "medium" brigade will comprise one battalion of medium tanks, two of light tanks, and two batteries of close support tanks. The light tanks will serve as "feelers" and as a mobile "fire-screen" for the medium tanks, which will then deliver the knock-out punch.

At the same time the new doctrine still visualizes the use of the older formations (such as infantry divisions), but in a modernized form. This year, in fact, has been devoted to experiments in such modernization. In the infantry brigade, one battalion of infantry has been replaced by a battalion of light tanks, while each of the remaining three battalions has been provided with mechanized transport and with Carden-Loyds for its machine-guns. In addition, a battery of mechanized Stokes mortars has been provided. The result, certainly, has been to persuade the average infantryman of the advantage of going to battle in an armoured "pill-box" instead of on his flat feet! And the difficulty has been to induce him to use his Carden-Loyds as supporting weapons, and not to use them as storm-troops.

Why does the new doctrine desire to retain the old formations, as well as introducing the new? The reason is partly a lingering conservatism and partly the varied types of country in which the British Army may have to operate. The mountains of the Indian frontier always loom large on

offensive, and split the French left wing by a thrust down the road to Rouen, was composed purely of tanks without any accompanying infantry or artillery.

There is a danger, now, that the impression made by their success last year may lead us to copy the style of organization which they learnt to modify—just as, after the German victories in 1870, our own army as well as the French, hastened to copy the showy features rather than the solid assets of the successful army.

The Current of War

the British horizon. Hence the new doctrine divides possible war-areas into two kinds—tank-country and infantry-country.¹ The first comprises the plains and undulating ground which fill the greater part of the world's surface, and the doctrine recognizes that the decisive struggles of history have usually been fought out in such areas. The second comprises mountains, forest, and swamps, where the man on foot has still the advantage, although even there light tanks and six-wheelers can operate in the valleys and intervals. As their powers increase, the need for infantry is likely to decrease, and only a small proportion will be required as "land-marines" for the "land-fleet."

Thus, in sum, the new British doctrine embodies most of the new gospel which the reformers have been preaching for nearly a decade. If it follows in their wake, it is no longer far behind. In the use of armoured forces, wide manoeuvre and the attack on the enemy's rear are to replace the "shunting" strategy of the past half-century, and in tactics it looks for guidance to the super-mobile Mongols who swept over Asia and paralysed medieval Europe.² Indeed, the doctrine even recognizes, discreetly, the advantages of a still greater breach with military convention which I have advocated during the past few years—that, although armour gives the new force much greater security in an assault, it should not necessarily be used in an assault.

For if the enemy like to take up strong anti-tank positions, why not let them sit there, while the armoured force interrupts their supplies or switches its fire-power to fresh points where it can similarly paralyse other bodies of the enemy? Instead of risking its armour in close combat, an

¹ In May and June, 1940, the distribution of the German armoured divisions, and the areas where they appeared, suggested that the German Command had carefully worked out their plans on such a basis of strategic geographical calculation. (See, further, Chapters XXV-XXVII.)

² A study of the Mongol campaigns, and the application of their methods to modern warfare, formed the first section of an early book of mine, *Great Captains Unveiled*. This, together with *Paris, or the Future of War*, was prescribed by the General Staff in 1927 for study by the officers of the Experimental Mechanized Force then created.

The New British Doctrine of Mechanized War

armoured force might use this protective skin simply for a close approach, not for an attack ; to move up to a " fluid " position whence, in comparative security, it could smother the enemy or cut his arteries of supply by a demoralizing fire.

The suggestion may seem disturbingly original to the orthodox soldier, but originality is the mainspring of successful war, and he who applies a novel device by a novel method has most often attained revolutionary results in history. Napoleon shocked the orthodox soldiers of his day.

So let us coin a new principle for this new force—to strike, by fire alone, at the greatest number of points in the shortest time over the widest area. Never coming close enough to give the enemy a target, yet enticing him to waste his ammunition and keeping his nerves at an exhaustingly high tension. Thus, by constant " in and out " approaches, an armoured force might reduce a vast infantry army to inertia. Once that happens, a moral rot is likely to set in among the hungry and helpless occupants of ineffective " positions," and in any case they will be easy and crowded targets for air bombers. Thereby an armoured force might achieve the ideal of Marshal Saxe, that connoisseur of the art of war, when he argued that a really able general might win a campaign without fighting a battle at all.

The armies of 1914-18 were like huge fungoid plants, firm-rooted and nourished through long stems. An armoured force has the power to be a deadly vapour " blowing where it lists "—an influence, invulnerable less through its armour than through its power to move, and to move away. Thus it would be intangible and all the more demoralizing.

CHAPTER VII

THE GRAVE DEFICIENCIES OF THE ARMY

(A WARNING IN 1933)

This was written on the eve of the establishment of the Nazi regime in Germany. It was published in *The English Review* for February, 1933—and actually appeared on the day following the news that Hitler had become Chancellor of the German Reich.

As an "audit" of the state of the British Army at that time, six years after the first successful trials of a mechanized force, it serves to show how little had been done to apply the lessons that this experience had brought out.

THE past year has witnessed a renaissance of leadership and of characteristically British methods on the training grounds of the British Army. Initiative and improvisation, in exercises of a colonial war type, have replaced the deliberate and machine-like tactics that we have so long imitated from Continental models. If the new mobility of thought and action reached its peak in the manoeuvres of the Tank Brigade on Salisbury Plain, it was pursued with equal zeal and zest in the infantry schemes around Aldershot, where we saw the budding new light infantry tactics adapted to modern war conditions and designed to challenge, by skill and craft, the present battlefield supremacy of the machine-gun.¹

But while the training of the Army has taken a marked step forward in 1932, the state of its equipment gives cause for grave disquiet.

¹ Brigadier (now General Sir Archibald) Wavell was the leading spirit in these Aldershot schemes, while Brigadier (now Major-General) Patrick Hobart was responsible for the Tank Brigade's new methods.

The Grave Deficiencies of the Army

To free the mind of the soldier from the shackles of trench-warfare is a real achievement, but its practical value is seriously diminished so long as his body labours under the material conditions that produced the trench stalemate eighteen years ago—and would do so again if the Army had to take the field as it is to-day.

There is scarcely a thoughtful soldier to-day, certainly among those who had front-line experience in the last war, who does not privily confess that our five existing divisions are hardly better than "suicide clubs." How can it be otherwise when the scale of infantry stopping power—of machine-guns and light automatics—has increased everywhere, while the scale of infantry supporting power—of guns and tanks—has greatly decreased since 1918?

The number of guns in a division is barely sufficient to provide an effective bombardment or barrage on the frontage of one infantry battalion. And there are still twelve such battalions in a division.¹

If artillery support is so deficient, is there any other form of fire-power that can make up the deficiency? What about the machine-guns of the attackers? The answer is that the value of this weapon in attack is very inferior to what it is in defence, unless it is mounted in a mobile "pill-box." Normally, it is still carried in a slow and vulnerable horsed-limber, and man-handled into action, so that its support to advancing troops is given at long range by indirect fire.

Few fighting soldiers regarded such indirect fire of much help in the last war, save on rare occasions. Fewer still have any confidence in such help in the open warfare for which the Army is being trained.

It would be more hopeful if the machine-gun could be rushed forward in little tracked machines, themselves protected against bullets, to pour a stream of bullets at

¹ Although the leading foreign armies had long since adopted a 9-battalion division, it was not until 1938 that the infantry component of the British division was reduced to the same figure—thereby proportionately increasing the amount of supporting fire available for them.

The Current of War

close range on to any hostile machine-gun that was checking the infantry. But at present only two of our fifteen regular brigades are provided, even partially, with these armoured machine-gun carriers. And there are none in the forty-two infantry brigades of the Territorial Army.

But, it may be asked, do not tanks take the place of guns? Here the answer is that we have only four battalions of tanks in the whole Army, at home and overseas. They could not go very far to help the 132 battalions of infantry that we maintain! Nor to carry out the decisive manœuvres against the enemy's rear that were the rôle of cavalry in the past, before cavalry were hamstrung by their modern vulnerability. And, in actual fact, if an emergency came to-morrow, we could only make up a single battalion to take the field at once. Even that would have to go overseas with its medium tanks of an obsolete eight-year-old model.

It would be not only dishonest, but a disservice to the country, to gloss over these facts, uncomfortable as they may be.

How can we explain them? The public, which pays nearly £40,000,000 a year to maintain an efficient Army, may naturally wonder how such a strange deficiency should exist fourteen years after the hardest experience, and costliest lesson, we have ever had.

The answer might be put in a single word—"inertia." It is not so much the inertia of individuals in authority, as the inertia of a system. Anyone who has ever been in the War Office will know what is meant without explanation. Against the immense inertia of the machinery, with all its interlocking cogs, progressive individuals are apt to struggle in vain, until they grow tired of the effort.

It is all the worse when, as to-day, the only change that can suffice is an extensive one—a drastic recasting of the Army and redistribution of the arms. Such a change has complications. Each tends to give pause to the would-be reformer and an excuse to those who prefer standing still.

The Grave Deficiencies of the Army

Beyond the checks inherent in the machinery itself, there is the Cardwell system, by which the home units are used to feed the overseas garrisons with drafts of men. This check has long been aggravated by the natural fact that the ripples of modernism are slowest in reaching the circumference of Empire, and changing the ideas there.

Another great complication is lack of money, inevitably aggravated by the progressive reductions of the Army allotment, and unfortunately also by the soldier's proverbial reluctance to cut his coat according to his cloth. But even if and when it is realized that money can only be found for new material by disposing of the old, two fresh checks come into action.

One is the opposition of vested interests and sentiments, necessarily affected by the conversion or cutting down of units that have a long tradition. They are as ready to fight to the last ditch in the budget as on the battlefield. Another is the fear that what is saved in this way will be taken away by greedy politicians. It is, unfortunately, a rare soldier who views his political chiefs except as ogres, or regards them as reasonable, and capable of the give and take which a politician, by his very calling, continually has to show.

This year, however, a new excuse for inaction has become predominant. It falls from so many lips that it sounds almost like a community chorus—and one looks for the song-leader. The burden of it is that the British Army must continue to be burdened with obsolete gear because its job is to carry "the white man's burden." That it is not really an Army, but merely a body of policemen. Surely, however, such a declaration should come, if at all, from the Government, rather than from the General Staff.

Even if this view was accepted, two tests suffice to show the unsuitability of the existing organization. First, a smaller number of units, if they were endowed with mobility, would mean that more could actually be concentrated at

The Current of War

the scene of any trouble—and before that trouble grew to dangerous proportions. To quench such outbreaks we want a “motor fire brigade” rather than a string of footmen with pails.

Secondly, the majority of the men who are drawn, often by hunger-pressure, into the ranks of our present infantry have neither the intelligence nor the education to be suitable policemen. Ten men recruited from a better class of the community, and provided with mechanized means of movement, would have more value for Imperial police work than thirty of the average present-day infantry.

Moreover, the “police” argument for keeping the Army unchanged would only be justifiable if the Government had been frankly warned that, as an Army, ours is unfit for war. Has this been done?

Statesmen are bound to rely on their military advisers, and are justified in assuming that, out of the money provided, the actual number of men maintained are adequately equipped. It is for their advisers to make it clear that to send our Army in its present state on an expedition against an enemy with modern firearms would mean vain slaughter and speedy stalemate. Even against tribesmen, is it wise policy to employ troops with such a slight margin of weapon superiority that it can be outweighed by the tribesman’s local knowledge and natural aptitude?

I do not presume to pass judgment on soldiers in power (limited), who have to contend with the paralysing inertia of a system. I do not criticize persons, but only a state of affairs. It is they, however, who will have to answer for deficiencies at the bar of history.

Nevertheless, when the new Estimates for 1933-34 were introduced in March, it was seen that out of a total of £38,000,000 for the Army only the trifling sum of £348,000 was allotted for the provision of tanks and other mechanized

The Grave Deficiencies of the Army

equipment. Not a single fresh tank unit was to be formed. Commenting on this in the *Daily Telegraph*, I wrote : " When one recalls the fact that even in 1927 we were spending £520,000 on this item, and notes the present tiny proportion of mechanized units, it will be realized that at the present rate of progress the Army could hardly expect to be fully mechanized before the year A.D. 2000."

In the course of the discussion on the Estimates, Mr. Tinker (Labour M.P. for Leigh) criticized the amount of money devoted to the maintenance of the cavalry as disproportionate to their military value. The sum in question was £605,000. Subsequently, Brigadier-General Makins (Conservative M.P. for Knutsford) said : " On one point I must congratulate the Financial Secretary (Mr. Duff Cooper) and that is that there has been no tampering with the cavalry, no amalgamation, no condensation, no tinkering of any sort. As an old cavalry soldier I say that that is very satisfactory, in spite of what has been said by the Hon. Member for Leigh, whom we are all delighted to hear. Every year he denounces the cavalry, though I am glad to say that his words fall on deaf ears. I know he very much enjoys saying these things. [Mr. Tinker : " I shall succeed yet."] And that's that. One thing which is very satisfactory is that the authorities feel that the day of the cavalry is not done. In fact, it is there just as much as ever."

In replying to the debate on behalf of the War Office, Mr. Duff Cooper referred to the criticisms of Mr. Tinker and Mr. Williams (Conservative M.P. for Torquay)—who had suggested that the cavalry at home might be halved in order to provide " more armoured car regiments, and so have more practical and up-to-date methods of fighting." On this question, Mr. Duff Cooper said : " I think it is certainly too early, if the time ever comes, to assume that the function of the cavalry is finished. As far as my own opinion is concerned, although it is of very little value in such matters, I am convinced that the cavalry has been sufficiently reduced already. . . ."

.

The following year, although the Army Estimates were increased to just on £40,000,000, the sum provided for tanks and other fighting vehicles was only raised to £501,000. It showed that the War Office were still trifling with the problem. A solitary light tank battalion was to be created, to form with

The Current of War

the existing battalions the first permanent tank brigade. In commenting on the new Estimates I drew attention to a significant point in them—that the actual cost of maintaining a tank battalion had now come down to almost the same amount as that of an infantry battalion. “Yet a tank battalion has about four times the fire-power and five times the mobility of an infantry battalion for barely half the man-power—the most expensive item both in war and peace.”

When introducing the Estimates, Mr. Duff Cooper (who had now succeeded Lord Hailsham as Secretary of State) referred with gentle sarcasm to the way that “military experts will tell you to exchange your last horse for a motor bicycle and push your last infantryman into a tank.” Saying that he did not wish to underrate that “most formidable” weapon, he went on to quote Colonel Henderson’s remark that “it takes years for military criticism to recover its equilibrium after any great invention.” There was every indication at present that the invention of “armour-piercing bullets” was outstripping that of “bullet-resisting armour.” He considered that it was at least possible that in a few years’ time the most heavily armoured tank would be as vulnerable to fire as “an old wooden caravan would be to the firing of to-day.”

In the course of the debate Mr. Tinker argued that even the fulfilment of this possibility would not make the horse any less vulnerable; while Brigadier-General Spears (Conservative M.P. for Carlisle) pointed out the danger of postponing mechanization merely because of the possibility that an answer to the tank might eventually be found. He illustrated his point by two parables: “When there was that awful railway accident on the Continent a couple of months ago, and the steel train caught up with the wooden train and killed practically everybody in the train, I thought to myself that that was a very good example of what would happen when a well-equipped army fought an ill-equipped army. . . . We cannot go on experimenting for ever, otherwise the day is bound to come when we shall be caught napping, and we know what happens when a lady puts off choosing a husband for too long.”

In reply to the last point, Mr. Duff Cooper remarked that he differed from the view that the type of force best suited to European warfare must also be the best for colonial operations. In answer to Mr. Tinker’s remarks, Mr. Duff Cooper said:

The Grave Deficiencies of the Army

"I should like to assure him . . . that he is not on good ground. I have had occasion during the past year to study military affairs both in my public and in my private life, and the more I study them the more impressed I become by the importance of cavalry in modern warfare." The reference to his private life presumably referred to his work in preparing the official biography of Haig.

In November of that year a representative of the General Staff gave a lecture at the Royal United Service Institution on the future organization of the Army, in the course of which he expressed the opinion that "it was becoming clearer that infantry must remain the backbone of modern armies." And the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd), in summing up, emphatically declared his conviction that "we should go slowly with mechanization."

When the Army Estimates for 1935-36 were presented, it was seen that they had been increased by nearly £4,000,000. Yet the extra amount allotted for mechanized equipment was only £271,000. Another significant point was that the sum provided for forage was increased to approximately £400,000, whereas the total outlay for petrol and lubricants was barely £130,000. In this vital respect, as it seemed to me, the outcome of the rearmament programme which had just been launched was not impressive—the mountain had been in labour and produced a mechanical mouse. Not only had we lost our original lead in tank design, but we had fallen so badly behind in the production of tanks as to be far out-numbered in this element—which alone offered, on land, any promise of effective attacking power under modern conditions.

Moreover, it had to be recognized that, as a peace-desiring nation, we should be debarred from exploiting the chance of initial surprise which a would-be aggressor inevitably enjoys. Thus it was necessary to take account of facts as they were, not as one would wish them to be. And to think out a method by which we could make the best of a bad job, seeking, if possible, to find a way of turning our now inevitable disadvantage into an advantage.

It was clear that a long time must elapse before we could re-equip even our existing small army with modern weapons, and achieve an adequate output of up-to-date tanks, even if progress along this line was accelerated—and of this there was

The Current of War

little prospect. In the air we were still on more or less equal terms with Germany. Surveying the problem, the most hopeful solution seemed to me that of concentrating on gaining a superiority in the air—which I had long stressed as likely to prove the decisive factor. This would be the best deterrent to war, as well as the most rapid and effective form of support that we could give to allies on the Continent. At the same time, I continued to urge that our policy in the renovation of the Army should be directed to the creation of armoured divisions rather than merely to the re-equipment of the infantry.

Our potential Expeditionary Force, of infantry divisions, would be "merely a drop in the Continental bucket." By contrast, foreign armies had only a small number of mechanized divisions.

In *The Times* of June 20, 1935, I wrote :

In recent years, the keynote of our own military authorities has been that we should not expect to make much change in the pattern and equipment of the Army till another war arrives ; that it would be wiser to concentrate on being ready to go into production when the moment comes, and to continue experiments meantime. That foundation of military policy may be undermined by the change of ideas abroad. To dispatch a small field force of the old pattern, as ours is at present, into a zone of mechanized operations might be to endanger its survival without compensating gain. To hold it back while it was being remodelled—with equipment to be manufactured after the outbreak of war—might forfeit any effect it might have in aiding the victim of aggression.

By contrast, the new situation would seem to offer us a much greater opportunity of influence than in the past. Good as our 1914 Expeditionary Force was for its size, by human quality surpassing its slender limits, it amounted to barely one-thirtieth of the forces initially deployed in the West. But in the opening phase of a struggle where the Continental powers relied on their mechanized spearheads, our field force, if likewise mechanized, would be comparable in size as well as in value with the force that they could

The Grave Deficiencies of the Army

employ. What a difference it might thus make. One may estimate the preponderant weight it could throw into the scales if available at once; and the influence its mere existence might have as a deterrent to aggression when the scales are hovering between peace and war.

.

The development of the Army, however, continued on traditional lines, and in ceremonial slow time. In *The Times* of October 30, 1936, I pointed out that "the nominal 200 tanks of our solitary tank brigade are a puny total compared with the thousands of tanks in the chief Continental armies"—and also that all our medium tanks were still of a 14-year-old type "now quite unfit to be sent into the field." In a further article on November 2, I emphasized that:

We can at least be clear that the chances of the tank increase with their quantity and decrease disproportionately when they are few. At present we seem to contemplate no more than our one existing tank brigade, re-equipped with modern machines—which would form part of a mobile division otherwise possessing small power of attack—and four battalions of infantry tanks still to be built. With so few tanks the chances of successful attack might well be zero. Against the multiplying anti-tank weapons of to-day it is certain that hope lies only in swarms—to swamp the defence.

The lack of modern equipment had, also, an unfortunate psychological effect. Without the means of mobility, it was difficult to develop the spirit of mobility—the quick-thinking, quick-acting leadership necessary to meet the new conditions of land warfare. Dealing with this problem in the same article (November 2, 1936) I wrote:

There are a number of officers who are real tacticians, whose natural aptitude has survived an unfavourable climate, but the proportion to the total is too small. They are like currants in a pudding.

The Current of War

There was an unpalatable abundance of suet in the exercises seen this year. "Safety first" seems to have largely superseded the theory *de l'audace, encore de l'audace, toujours de l'audace* of Danton, which was also Napoleon's. Conformity to the manuals, confusion due to constant changes of detail, and excessive emphasis on meticulous order-writing have produced a slow-motion habit which is inimical to the exploitation of opportunities. Instead of building tactical art on a basis of battle-drill, thus quickening its application, we have turned tactics into a drill in slow time. The effect is seen in an attitude of what can only be described as "reckless caution." It is the opposite of real security, while it stultifies the possibility of achieving surprise. To-day we are slaves of the obvious instead of being masters of surprise. Without a far more highly developed battle-craft there can be but a dim prospect of shaking the sovereignty of the defence.

The leisurely course we were pursuing, together with the lack of a sense of proportion, offered no other prospect than that we should be increasingly outclassed both in the air and on land—especially in the arms that mattered most.

Visits to France had brought depressing evidence that military authority there was even more reluctant than our own to admit the practicality of the new ideas on warfare. "Orthodoxy was exalted to such a pitch that it became the most powerful of contraceptives." Many others who watched the French Army at work remarked the extreme deliberation of operations, of detail carried so far that it became an encumbrance. There were signs of improvement after Gamelin, in 1935, assumed charge of it; nevertheless, if his outlook was more progressive than that of his predecessors and most of his contemporaries, it was only among some of the younger officers that one found a clear picture of the new possibilities. While the French began to mechanize a few of their cavalry divisions (with light armoured vehicles) their rate of conversion continued to be slow—compared with the German.

It is, however, a mistake to imagine that either in doctrine or in training, French military thought was dominated by

The Grave Deficiencies of the Army

defensive ideas. Their doctrine was predominantly concerned with the offensive, and the greater part of their training devoted to practising the attack—despite their lack of modern offensive weapons. In these respects their attitude corresponded, on a larger scale, to our own. It was only the specialist units, who garrisoned the Maginot Line, whose training was concentrated on practising a defensive technique. The bulk of their forces were trained and equipped with a view to the execution of the normal kind of attack ; either against the German frontier, or in answer to a German penetration of the Maginot Line—which itself had a shallowness that made it susceptible to penetration, if not to a widespread assault.

It seemed plain to me that for the French to embark on the offensive, without the new means necessary for it, was the surest way to a disaster that might be fatal to their prospects of subsequent resistance. And the further they advanced, the more dangerous it might be—in face of the growing German superiority in mechanized forces. From what I knew of the up-to-date ideas of Field-Marshal von Blomberg, then Defence Minister, I felt that there was nothing that he would welcome more than for the French to take the offensive—in order to set a trap for them. I knew, too, that General von Reichenau, formerly his Chief of Staff, had been the keenest student of British ideas on the future of mechanized warfare—so that the trap was likely to be fitted with armoured teeth. As far back as May, 1936, I suggested that, if the French should be lured to advance, either into Belgium or into the Saar, “the Germans would launch a counter-stroke through Belgian Luxembourg with their mechanized divisions.” (That came true exactly four years later. Likewise, the offensive which the French attempted at the outbreak of war showed how little impression could be made by the old-style method of deliberate attack.)

At the same time, a potential new instrument of surprise appeared on the horizon—in the form of parachute troops. The first experiments with them were carried out by the Russian Army, and, perhaps for that reason, the military authorities in England and France were not inclined to take them very seriously. I disagreed with this attitude and pointed out, in *The Times* of September 18, 1936, that :

Any instrument of surprise starts with a big advantage in war. Audacity pays, especially when allied with mobility.

The Current of War

Because of its range and power of variability, the "parachute stroke" has possibilities that it would be foolish to under-rate. Its indirect strategic influence may be much greater than its actual results.

All armies, and nearly all commanders, are acutely susceptible to the threat of a blow in the back, and to the interruption of their communications. The knowledge that the enemy has parachute forces that can be dropped near important bridges or other crucial points in their rear is likely to increase this fear. The risk may well cause the higher command to strengthen all detachments and posts on the lines of communication, thus producing a subtraction of force from the main concentration many times larger than the parachute forces which the enemy possesses. Added to this is the psychological strain. Thus, by the mere threat of their existence, such forces have a promise of great effect—far greater than any damage they may actually do.

.

In a subsequent article on the same subject I emphasized that "an air-borne sabotage campaign," in conjunction with the widespread air attacks "might be able to 'make hay while the bombs fall,' multiplying the confusion as well as the destruction."

.

A survey, early in 1937, of the basic factors in the problem which confronted us led me towards certain conclusions, mutually linked. First, that, in face of the growing strength of anti-tank defence, the best chance for applying the new offensive technique lay in starting with the advantage of surprise. Second, that the peace-seeking policy of France and Britain would inevitably deprive them of this opportunity. Third, that for them to adopt an offensive strategy, without the necessary superiority, could only lead to a costly repulse that might open the way to disaster. Fourth, that, even if they could mobilize their full man-power, it would not give them an adequate superiority of numbers. Fifth, that, while such a

The Grave Deficiencies of the Army

superiority might be gained by developing their mechanized power, nothing but bitter experience would induce them to remodel their forces on such a new basis. Sixth, that, in these conditions, the best hope of their security lay in utilizing the advantages of the defensive-offensive, and in providing the necessary modern means for it. Since such an aim could be fulfilled without any such big superiority of force as the offensive required, and means could be provided within a measurable time, it seemed to me the most practical immediate aim to pursue.

A sober calculation of these basic facts pointed to the necessity for developing the best possible defensive technique—one that should be even more up to date than the new offensive methods which we had evolved, and the Germans had borrowed. The appropriate basis of it seemed to lie in the combination of elastic defence in depth by the infantry, with rapid and powerful counter-strokes by mobile armoured forces, highly manœuvrable. Our first aim, therefore, should be to create this kind of force without delay.

Shortly after the advent of Mr. Hore-Belisha as War Minister, in May, 1937, I had the opportunity to put forward a detailed scheme for the reorganization of the Army—based on the axioms that “the survival of nations, and armies, throughout the ages has depended on their power of adaptability to changing conditions”; and that “machine-power, not man-power, is the determining condition of success in modern warfare.” It was suggested in this paper that, by the conversion of old-style units, two armoured divisions might be created at home, a third in Egypt, and a fourth in India—while two more might be formed from the Territorial Army. Also, that in view of the value of an “air barrage” for covering the advance of mobile forces, the artillery hitherto considered necessary for such divisions should be “replaced by air squadrons allotted and trained for the purpose.”

In justification of these proposals, I argued that such mechanized forces offered the best solution of both our two most likely military problems—that of meeting an Italian threat in Africa, and that of meeting a German threat in the West. In regard to the latter problem my argument was that under modern conditions of warfare “the use of ordinary infantry divisions is not likely to have much effect in offensive operations.” And for the defence of our ally's country—“its

The Current of War

own army is likely to suffice so far as *infantry* action is concerned. In view of the number of ordinary divisions any such country possesses, what we could despatch would only be a fractional addition. Because of financial and conventional limitations, however, it is unlikely that any ally will possess more than a small proportion of fully mechanized divisions. Hence a contribution of this kind might count for much more than its mere numbers implied—e.g. in August, 1914, the four British divisions despatched to France represented barely 6 per cent of the forces deployed to meet the invaders, whereas two armoured mobile divisions to-day would increase by 66 per cent the forces of this kind available in France."

In a further paper of November, 1937, directed more particularly to the problems of the Middle East, I argued that a solution could only be found through developing our mechanized strength in that area, and proposed that, besides an armoured division in Egypt, a further one should be formed for the defence of our territories adjoining Italian East Africa—the Sudan, Kenya, and British Somaliland. This scheme was designed to produce three armoured divisions in the Middle East and India, and three at home—apart from the two to be formed in the Territorial Army.

While strengthening our position in the Eastern Mediterranean, and providing an armoured reinforcement for that region, the scheme would enable us to have at least two armoured divisions ready to support France in the West—a better alternative than the four infantry divisions of our field force as then contemplated. The former would be easier to ship, and easier to maintain under the threat of modern air attack, besides being themselves far less vulnerable to bombing. I emphasized that "because of their value for rapid and powerful riposte in emergency, if any breach should be made in the French frontier defences," these armoured divisions would have a value "probably greater than if the whole Field Force of the present pattern were available."

Mr. Hore-Belisha was keenly appreciative of the possibilities of mechanization, but the idea of any such radical alteration in the ratio of armoured units to infantry was dubiously regarded in the higher military quarters. Although our first fully mechanized division was formed that autumn, and one in Egypt a year later, their completion and equipment were perilously slow—despite his efforts. While lip-service was

The Grave Deficiencies of the Army

paid to the mechanized standard, the traditional man-power standard continued to dominate our military preparations.

Then came the growing clamour for conscription, which, unhappily, obscured the real problem. Its adoption, following hard on the doubling of the Territorial Army in numbers, meant that the new equipment had to be spread out more widely—and was thus too thinly spread. A further ill result was that money and manufacturing resources were diverted to non-essential kinds of equipment for non-essential types of force. When the war came two years later, there was still only one armoured division at home—and when the German offensive was launched, nine months afterwards, it was still at home. It was thus inevitable that when the Germans applied, in May, 1940, what the French Prime Minister mistakenly termed "a new conception of warfare," the British Army could not adequately supplement the deficiency of the French in the modern means to counter it.

Among other suggestions made in 1937 were two in particular which, if they had been accepted, might at least have helped to ease the difficult situation in which the British forces were placed three years later as a result of the German breakthrough on the French front. The first was that, whatever force we sent, the risk from hostile air attack on the Channel ports should be minimized by creating a fleet of sea-going barges which could proceed up the rivers and canals there, to load or unload troops and supplies.

The second was that, so far as we continued to use infantry divisions, they should be given the maximum mobility by mounting all the troops in handy-sized light trucks, with bullet-proof protection—instead of providing (as the General Staff proposed) only enough lorries, of a cumbersome type, to carry one-third of the infantry at a time.

Another principal feature of my scheme was the doubling, at least, of our anti-aircraft defences. The reigning plan provided for a scale of approximately 600 guns for the defence of Great Britain, and even this was very far from complete. An examination of the problem, on the basis of strategic geography, had led me to the conclusion that a scale of 1200 guns was the minimum that could give reasonable security to our cities and ports. And my estimate was practically identical to that reached by an expert committee which investigated the problem. Unfortunately, their proposals were christened

The Current of War

the "Ideal Scheme"—and thereby given a sense of unreality fitting it for the pigeon-hole reserved for speculations. Despite the urgency of planning such an expansion, attempts to press the question found little favour with the General Staff as then constituted. The opposition offered to an adequate scale of anti-aircraft defence became one of the factors which helped to precipitate the decision that autumn to make drastic changes in the Army Council.

Yet the changes brought only a modest extension of ideas and plans. The chief gain was that priority of supply was at last conceded. But it was contended that if we carried out the larger scheme, we should be over-insuring ourselves, and that a fractional increase of the scale would suffice. That view prevailed—until, in March, the Germans' invasion of Austria came as a shock which revived the question. Even then, only a 50 per cent addition to the scale was conceded, while its execution was put off until the autumn. It was not until the fresh shock of the Munich crisis that the fuller scale was approved—and then, after a fresh jolt, extended.

Throughout this period it seemed to me that our efforts ought to be governed by the combination of a sense of time with a sense of proportion. We should give priority to measures which best met the immediate problem—that of secure defence—while blending them as far as possible with those which would enhance our ultimate offensive power. The development of mechanized forces was a clear case of how these two purposes might be simultaneously pursued. For the development of such forces would provide the best immediate counter to any hostile offensive, either in the Western or the Mediterranean theatre, while every stage in their growth would improve our potential capacity for the offensive. It would also mean that through the increasing security of our defence the danger of war would decrease.

This guiding idea prompted me to advocate, in the naval sphere, that priority should be given to destroyers and the new motor torpedo-boats—the best counter to a submarine offensive against our shipping, as well as to any threat of invasion.

On the same reasoning, I urged that in aircraft production the development of our fighter strength was more urgent than that of our bomber strength—since an ample force of fighters would not only check air attack on this country, but be the best answer to the Germans' use of dive-bombers in land

The Grave Deficiencies of the Army

warfare. An additional argument was that our fighter strength could be expanded much quicker. Yet, during these critical years, our defensive capacity was restricted by persistent official adherence to a ratio of approximately one fighter to two bombers—which were much more expensive to produce, while their crews required longer training. Not until after the Munich crisis was the proportion improved to a 3 to 5 ratio ; and not until after some months of war was the formation of the additional squadrons approved.

On the same reasoning, again, I pressed for the timely provision of adequate shelters for the civil population—as, even if the dream of a superior bomber-force were ultimately fulfilled, I could not see that this dream would in the *meantime* be a sufficiently concrete covering for the men and women who formed the base of our prospective national effort. Unless the security of this base was first ensured, there could never be the offensive to which the militant theorists devoted their attention. Unfortunately they were predominant in high places—and with eyes fixed on their cherished vista they neglected to watch the ground beneath their feet—thus walking into a bog.

The same tendency was prevalent among those who were responsible for the fate of France—and with fatal results. Since the French collapse they have been reproached with a defensive habit of mind, whereas the cause of that catastrophe, like the redeemable disasters of 1914, was due rather to a habit of offensive day-dreaming. This has been aptly epitomized by M. Maurois in *Why France Fell*, where he deals with the armament-production plans of the French before, and during the first phase of, the war. "The programmes were designed for a war which was never to take place. The General Staff determined upon a long-term preparation for attack upon the Siegfried Line. It had calculated, with admirable precision, how many heavy guns would be necessary for this operation, and these guns were ordered at a time when all our efforts should have been devoted to urgent and immediate needs—anti-tank guns, anti-aircraft guns, and light arms, such as machine-guns and sub-machine-guns." Moreover, on mobilisation, many skilled workers were called up—the Renault factories, vitally important for producing tanks and trucks, were reduced from 30,000 to 7000 personnel. Thus did conscription defeat its own ends.

CHAPTER VIII

BRITAIN IS IN DANGER

(ON THE THRESHOLD OF 1939)

Six years had passed since the warning of 1933 about "grave deficiencies," when—after Hitler had been six years in power—the following article was published under the above title in the *Evening Standard* of January 23, 1939. It had for some time become difficult to write the truth about the military situation, not only because it might apprise the German leaders of our weaknesses—although they were probably better aware of them than our people—but because of the prevailing reluctance here to publish "an unvarnished tale." And the increasing restraints of official secrecy further complicated the problem of presenting a sufficient full and true balance-sheet. I could not, for instance, deal with the ominously slow rate of tank production.

It had, however, long been my reading of history that the danger of suppressing essential facts has tended to be greater than the danger of stating them. And observation of the course of events had deepened that conviction. Thus I was moved to deliver an urgent and emphatic warning, while there was still time, backed by as much of the facts as it was possible to mention. Its publication produced an outburst—but hardly of energy. This was the last opportunity to write so frankly.

THE events of the last year, and especially the last few months, have brought the British people some realization of the dangers of their situation. But it is apparent both from official speeches and from many of the remedies unofficially proffered that the situation is still being seen through a fog.

Our strong point as a people has been our adaptability

Britain is in Danger

to circumstances as they arise ; our weakness, that the predicaments into which we get could usually have been forestalled through forethought.

This requires not only the habit of looking ahead, but the faculty of seeing, and "registering," facts. Too much wishful thinking marks, and mars, our attitude to foreign policy and the military conditions which underlie it. We need to approach these problems not with the idea of suiting our conclusions to our interests, but in the spirit and with the method of the scientist, whose predominant interest is to discover the truth.

What are the facts which we ought to "register" in our minds when determining the way of tackling the problem? Three are fundamental. The first is that the population of this country is dependent for food, its industries for raw material, and its forces for motive power, on supplies from abroad. Hence a navy that can assure the use of the sea-routes is vital to our existence.

The second fact is that this country—by reason of its degree of industrialization—is the most sensitive of any to air attack, and its capital—by reason of size, geography, and combination with the chief port—the most vulnerable of any. Hence adequate protection against air attack is also vital.

The third fact is that to fulfil these requirements air and sea defence must claim so much of the manufacturing and financial resources available as to limit the expansion of the Army. Obviously, the Army could not be built up to the size attained in the last war—all the less because a modern army needs an even higher ratio of weapon-power to man-power.

Next, we must note some facts of the past that bear on the present and future. Of the three enemy navies in 1914-18 only one, the German, was strong enough to be a serious factor. Moreover, the German Navy was geographically bottled up in the North Sea, the Austrian

The Current of War

bottled up in the Adriatic, the Turkish bottled up in the Sea of Marmora. Except on rare occasions, submarines alone were able to slip out and interfere with our sea-traffic. When Germany opened her under-sea offensive of 1917 she had 111 sea-going submarines; only about one-third of them were operating at any one time. Although some 3000 destroyers and auxiliary patrol craft were employed to combat them, they took so high a toll that in one month alone, April, nearly a million tons of shipping were sunk, one ship out of every four which left our ports never came home, and this country was brought perilously close to starvation.

To-day, the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo triangle comprises three powerful navies, each of them strong in submarines as well as in destroyers and new kinds of torpedo craft which can be used against merchant-shipping. If the German Navy is still enclosed in the North Sea, we have to reckon with the possibility that its commerce-raiders may have the use of Spanish naval bases which lie disturbingly close to our main ocean-routes and the approaches to our ports. So may the Italian Navy, whose own bases lie astride the Mediterranean, abutting on our own and the French communications there. And the Japanese Navy is so placed as not only to dominate the Far East, but to be a serious distraction to our strength in European waters.

The three navies have some 270 submarines built or building—proof that they do not share our complacent tendency to believe that the sting of this weapon has been drawn.

To protect our convoys it is doubtful whether we could make available even 100 escort vessels, compared with 400 in 1917. And our shipping has declined—from 2800 sea-going vessels at the start of the last war to less than 1800 now—so that a similar proportion of losses would be more dangerous to our supply.

The facts of our air defence have a still more unfavourable

Britain is in Danger

reflection. They also tell a worse story of neglect to keep pace with the rise of danger.

Although in the last war the bombing force which Germany formed for raiding this country was very small, the largest raid being made by barely 40 machines, we maintained no less than 500 guns and 400 aircraft to guard against the danger, about two-thirds of these being used to cover London. Now Germany has a bombing force of probably 1800 machines, a large part of which is capable of being used against this country. During the whole war only 74 tons of bombs were dropped on this country by hostile aeroplanes—hardly a tenth of what might now be dropped in a single day.

Now turn to the record of our Government's preparations to meet this menace. The Nazis gained power in Germany six years ago, and it soon became clear that they were intent on creating a great air force. But they started almost from zero, whereas we had a first-line strength of some 880 machines, and the French over 1600. It should have been possible to keep ahead.

By 1936 the Germans had drawn level with our total which, despite a belated expansion programme, was only about 1100. Even so, ours and the French together was probably more than double the German, and equal to the German and Italian combined.

Very different, for the worse, was the balance presented last September, when we had to face the possibility of war. The German first-line strength had risen to well over 3000 machines—about double what we had in this country. Our expansion programme, framed on an obviously inadequate basis, had also fallen badly behind schedule. The German output of machines was reported to be 600 a month, and ours less than half—yet in 1918 our output reached 3500 a month!

Worse still, however, was the state of unreadiness of the force we nominally had. It was relatively weaker than

The Current of War

before rearmament began. None of our bombing squadrons appears to have been operatively complete. Only a fraction of our bombers could have been employed. Only a fraction of their crews were fully trained. Only a fraction of our fighter squadrons were equipped with up-to-date machines ; these were armed with fixed machine-guns, as in the last war, whereas a considerable proportion of the German fighters were armed with cannon guns and might thereby engage *our* bombers at long range, while themselves out of range.

No less depressing was the state of our defence from the ground. It was not until late in 1935 that our Territorial anti-aircraft division was formed, for the protection of London and the south of England. Another year and more elapsed before a second was added for the North and Midlands. Towards the end of 1937 only about 60 guns and 200 searchlights were available for the first, while the state of the second was worse. And the guns were all of the old 3-inch pattern, a last war type renovated. The production of the new types has suffered not only by the difficulty of the firms in getting machinery, but sometimes even more by inordinate delay in getting specifications and contracts through the Government machine.

When the emergency came in September, the total guns available, old and new, were less than we had had to meet the insignificant air menace of a generation earlier. There were little more than a hundred for the London area—reference to the Army List could have shown anyone, even before they were set out in the parks, that there would be only 120 even if the complement were complete. As for the modern 3·7-inch guns, they did not appear to be more than a small fraction, perhaps a fifth of the total—in contrast to the impression of rapid output given to Parliament in the spring. But even the apparent total of guns, small as it was, far exceeded the sum of reality. For many of the guns were issued from the ordnance depots in

Britain is in Danger

an unusable state. If an attack had come, a large proportion—perhaps almost half of them—would not have been capable of engaging the enemy.

What has been related is but a fraction of the tale of defects and deficiencies, most of which were avoidable with any reasonable degree of forethought or efficiency. Many of them were pointed out—it is not a case of being wise after the event, but of official myopia. Moreover, the treatment of the problem also suffered because it was viewed in bits instead of as a whole.

When it became clear that we had lost our chance to keep ahead of Germany in armaments, it would still have been possible to minimize the risks of our delay in producing aircraft and guns by hastening the simpler measures of protection which come under the head of air-raid precautions. Adequacy here was much easier and cheaper to attain. Yet September made manifest the backwardness of organization and the failure to prepare underground shelter for a population which, through the delays in rearmament, was left to depend on cover in place of defences.

The derelict trenches in the parks have remained as memorials of the War that was lost without a shot.

Here are facts of vital significance. They cannot be hidden from trained observers abroad, and it would be folly to hide them from our own people. For the chance of redeeming the position depends on full and quick recognition of these facts and their meaning. Our Ministers may be acquainted with them. Acquaintance is not enough. They must realize their implication, as an imputation on the way they have hitherto fulfilled the trust placed in them—as trustees for the British Commonwealth. The facts must also be brought home to our people, so that they may not merely support, but push, the measures that are needed.

Progress is hindered by the persistence of fallacies. Some of the remedies which are being urged are not related to

The Current of War

the facts of modern war, or to the facts of our actual situation, or to the time factor. One of the most misleading fallacies is embedded in the catch phrase that "attack is the best defence." It is only true when the conditions fit it. Yet it is being used—at a time when war is an imminent possibility—as an argument for disregarding the need of shelters and other civil precautions while trying to build a bombing force for the future that can match Germany's at the moment. More fantastic still, it is argued that the way to counter the air menace is to build an army big enough to defeat the opposing army and thus occupy the hostile air bases. A simple comparison of the strength of the existing armies, and a simple calculation of the comparative populations, ought to be enough to dispel such a fallacy.

It is more than time we realized that Munich has changed the strategic balance of Europe, to the grave disadvantage of France and Britain. There is no ground for thinking that they can "win" a war by arms. But it is still within their capacity, thanks to others' economic weakness and the inherent strength of defence in modern war, to show an aggressor that he cannot win it.

The possibility depends on a sense of time and on a sense of reality. Our defence policy must be adjusted to the facts of the present situation.

These are by no means all adverse. There is reason to suspect serious flaws in the war machines of the "Axis," especially in their driving axles. And these are the more dangerous, to them, because of the way they are hidden. The problem of these powers is to stand the strain of a long war. Our problem is to prevent a war being short—to safeguard ourselves against a knock-out blow. It calls for rapid steps towards minimizing the vulnerability of this country and its population while we are engaged on the inevitably slower process of developing our forces.

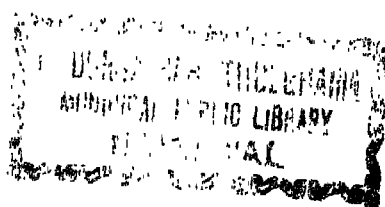
Such striking forces as we have may act offensively, but only so far as conditions permit. The military-minded

Britain is in Danger

advocates of "attack as the best defence" are too apt to forget the elementary principle that operations should proceed from a secure base. We should be wise to apply it not only in our home defence policy but in our foreign policy. To remember that for us a secure base includes the security of the sea-routes should be reminder of the importance to us of Spain.

Another condition of a secure base is an effort to create national unity. It is foolish complacency to talk of the nation being united behind the present Government when any scientific observation shows that it is almost evenly divided—and deeply divided where it is not apathetic. To close the breach we require a clear policy, based on principles which are likely to command through common agreement—and inspire faith. We can find it in the British ideals of justice and freedom. A mere appeal to material interest or self-preservation will never produce a dynamic effort. Our possible adversaries have an enthusiasm that we lack. To withstand them, we need to face them with a positive faith, not a negative fatalism.

PART III
LIGHTNING OVER POLAND



INTRODUCTION

AS the tension grew during the years before the war, it became increasingly difficult to give the public a true view of the situation—not only because increasing secrecy everywhere made it harder to ascertain the facts, but because of objections to publishing such a view where it did not accord with prevailing ideas of expediency. The difficulty was increased by divergence of opinion over the Government's policy in putting off a stand against aggression and abandoning the principle of collective security.

In my view, this long-continued retreat was not only weakening our moral position but undermining our strategic position. While acutely aware of our military flaws—perhaps more aware of their real nature than were statesmen who still reckoned in terms of numbers—I considered that the importance of administering a check to aggressive policies justified the risk of making a stand so long as we held the *strategic* trump cards. Over Abyssinia, and again over Spain, our strategic advantage in case of war was so clear as to be a deterrent to war, and to outweigh the tactical risks if it came. Over Czecho-Slovakia, the risk was obviously greater, but it was worth taking to forestall a worse one—*so long as* Russia's co-operation was obtained. In the months that followed Munich, I urged that an effective peace front could still be created, but only on condition that the support of Russia and Turkey, “the two essential props,” was secured without delay.

But I disagreed with the *way* in which the Government, suddenly reversing its steps, sought to revive the peace front in March—by giving a single-handed guarantee to Poland *before* any assurance of Russian support had been obtained. Such a guarantee to a country that was strategically isolated, and thus impossible, in a practical sense, to defend, seemed to me to be inviting trouble. By its timing, this guarantee was bound to act as a provocation. By its placing, in a part of Europe inaccessible to us, it formed an almost irresistible temptation.

The Current of War

Once Hitler had arranged a pact with Russia, he could be sure of an offensive success in the east against Poland, while enjoying the advantages of the defensive in the west.

Thereby our foreign policy undermined the basis of the only defence policy which suited our means. For instead of France and Britain being able to fulfil their purpose simply by presenting a strong front to any attack—which is the best check upon aggressive impulses—they gave Hitler an easy chance of breaking a weak front, and thus gaining an initial triumph. Worse still, if the Allies declared war in fulfilment of their obligations, they would automatically forfeit the advantages of defence and be committed to an inherently offensive strategy—under the most unfavourable conditions, and without the necessary resources. If they merely tapped at the Siegfried Line they would display their impotence. If they pressed their attack they would only pile up their losses and weaken their own chance of subsequent resistance. No one with knowledge of the scale and equipment of the Allied forces in 1939 could imagine them breaking through that deeply fortified system.

Furthermore, our political leadership, despite its desire to preserve peace, failed to show an elementary understanding of psychology in the way it dealt with Hitler over the Polish problem after suddenly changing its prolonged policy of appeasement. While the direct cause of the war lay in German aggressiveness, the contributory effect of that sudden change of attitude on our part cannot be ignored by anyone with an historical sense or a knowledge of psychology. In strategical terms, we turned from continuous retreat to rigid resistance, without trying the intermediate method of elastic defence and counter-manceuvre.

The effect was made more dangerous by the surge of indignation, righteous yet also pugnacious, which began to sweep over the country after the German invasion of Bohemia. This was manifested in many public speeches during the succeeding months. In the circumstances produced by our guarantee to Poland, their tone was too

Introduction

much akin to the schoolboy's way of "daring" another to strike—always the most certain way of provoking a blow. One particularly striking example was a speech made by a prominent member of the House of Lords, who was also a great industrialist. After affirming his loyalty to the Prime Minister's policy, he remarked: "Mr. Chamberlain is trying to obviate bloodshed. Otherwise I would like to see a war to-morrow." He went on to say that we were much better prepared than in 1914—a statement which, relative to the conditions, was quite untrue. And he was in a position where he had reason to know better.

On top of this emotional wave, the ideas of compulsion and the organization of the nation on totalitarian lines were irresistibly swept forward. They were almost immediately marked by the hasty introduction of conscription. For my own part, deepening study of history had led me to change my earlier view of the advantage of the conscriptive system. I had come to see that this product of the French Revolution had been a cause of dry-rot in European civilization. Already, "the Ides of March" had seen France converted almost overnight to what was virtually a totalitarian system. (The results of thirteen months of this system did not bear out the belief that it would produce greater efficiency.)

It appeared to me that the adoption of conscription by Britain was fundamentally incompatible with the defence of freedom, and thus an ominous betrayal of the cause we were upholding. It seemed to me, also, unsuitable in a practical sense to the kind of war which I foresaw. The conscription scheme was likely to hinder rather than improve our efficiency in meeting any early crisis, owing to the extra strain it would throw on an over-burdened military machine, while the abundance of civil controls that were being planned to come into effect on the outbreak of war carried a serious risk of causing confusion and stagnation. (This anticipation was confirmed by the experience of the first winter of the war, when aircraft production fell heavily below the rate attained the previous summer. Indeed,

The Current of War

according to report, it was not until shortly before the German offensive was launched in the spring that the rate of production even regained the former level. While black-out conditions were partly responsible, the calling-up of skilled workers for the Army was an important adverse factor.)

On August 4, 1939, I wrote this reflection: "Twenty-five years since the 'War to end War' began, and we are on the brink of another. And one that is no more likely to end it, if one reads the signs correctly. For years past I have watched the spread of irrationality—so intense as to be, clearly, insanity—in Germany. During the past year I have been more concerned to observe the growth of similar if milder symptoms here, at least among a large and influential section. It is bound to lead to a clash, and likely to produce a struggle in which the true purpose of our policy, that of curbing aggression, will be forgotten in the urge to give blow for blow regardless of the consequences to humanity and civilization. Blood is rising to the head—obscuring the vision.

"We needed to develop, and practise, a new technique in resisting aggression—but instead are likely to fall back on the old witches' remedy—applying 'the hair of the dog that bit him.'"

Long study of the history of war—its causes and consequences, as well as its strategy and tactics—had brought me to the broad conclusions which follow:

1. Wars have frequently proved profitable—to an aggressor. But only if victory has been quickly gained.

2. If the aggressor is foiled in his bid for victory, the war is likely to be long—unless the two sides find an agreed basis of peace. For an aggressive state is not likely to launch a war unless it can reckon on a considerable margin of strength at the outset.

3. From a long war both sides are losers. The more they strive for outright victory the longer the war will be. The longer the war the greater the loss to all those engaged—except to the parasite class of war-profiteers, which includes the place-seekers.

Introduction

4. As a peaceful nation is usually a satisfied nation it has most to lose from a long and exhausting war. For that reason, victory is a bad aim for it to adopt—all the more because it is likely to be handicapped by a slow start.

5. A peace gained by victory is apt to be a bad security for the victors—since it creates a desire for revenge. Even if they are wise enough to impose moderate terms, the blow to the defeated nation's pride in having to accept an imposed peace produces a desire to reverse it. Thus any peace of victory sows the seeds of fresh war.

For that reason, it is all the more foolish for a peaceful nation to seek peace through victory. The idea of victory is a mirage in the desert that a long war creates.

6. Force can be crushed by force—although only at a much heavier cost than would be required to hold it in check. Even so, the *idea* which gives rise to the use of force cannot be crushed by force. But it may be *curbed*—by demonstrating that the attempt to fulfil it by force is likely to prove futile.

7. Thus the first care of a peaceful nation should be, in peace, to ensure the power to deter a would-be aggressor. And if, through neglect of this need, it becomes involved in war, its aim should be to convince the aggressors that their pursuit of victory is likely to bring them more loss than gain, and that they can only regain peace on a basis of common agreement.

Such an aim, if resolutely and consistently followed in speech and action, is the one best calculated to weaken both the will of the aggressor's troops and people. It is far more easily attainable than a war-aim of victory over the aggressor-nation; for this inevitably rallies the people behind their leaders and hardens their resistance, through fear of the consequences of defeat.

By September 3, 1939, every one of these seven pillars of wise policy, built on the hard experience of the past, had been undermined.

CHAPTER IX

THE PROSPECT IN A WAR OVER POLAND

(August 27, 1939)

This estimate of the situation was written a week before the war—after a week of crisis during which the news of the German-Soviet Pact had been followed by the publication of the Anglo-Polish Pact. The memorandum was sent privately to a small number of statesmen, of all parties, who had consulted me at various times on military questions.

IF the military situation could be estimated purely on the balance of forces, Poland should be capable of holding in check the proportion of the German forces that could be concentrated on her front after allowing for the defence of the German frontier in the west. But other factors weigh in the scales against her. The immense length of Poland's frontiers and the consequent low density of force to space, offer an attacker large scope for manoeuvre, and thus tend to endanger in her case the normal advantage which the defence possesses in modern war. The total length of her frontiers is nearly 3500 miles, while her common frontier with Germany or German-controlled territories is about 2000 miles—eight times as long as the Franco-German frontier. The paucity of her internal communications is a further handicap to her in meeting widely extended attacks along her geographically enveloped frontier. While the depth of her territory allows her more room for manoeuvre in retreat than Czecho-Slovakia possessed, the comparative density of the latter's communications allowed more chance of parrying the invader's thrusts by rapid switching of

The Prospect in a War over Poland

reserves. Moreover, the state of equipment of Poland's army and the state of her industrial resources are considerably less than those Czecho-Slovakia enjoyed, while the morale of her people is more uncertain.

Account has also to be taken of the peculiar strategic situation produced by the intermixture of East Prussia and the Polish Corridor. The shallowness of the Corridor endangers its defence, especially if attacked from both sides simultaneously. The obvious counter is for the Poles to invade East Prussia, but the nature of the country and the relatively weak armament of the Polish forces are serious hindrances to any rapid progress being attained by such a stroke. It is more likely that the Germans would be able to cut the Corridor, before an invasion of East Prussia could go far, while the losses suffered by the Poles in a hurried offensive against East Prussia might jeopardize their general defensive situation.

On balance, it seems probable that the Poles may be driven to yield more ground in the first phase of a war than Czecho-Slovakia might have had to. Subsequently the difficulties imposed on an invader by the nature of the country and its poor communications should assist Poland's defence—*provided that her morale holds out, and that Russia does not move against her.*

There is, unfortunately, little promise of effect in anything that France and Britain can do to help Poland by direct action against Germany. They can "nibble" at the comparatively narrow German front in the west—but the greater their efforts the more likely it is that the cost to themselves will be disproportionate to that of its defenders. It would be folly to imagine that any deep penetration, or far-reaching effect, can be attained here. They can bomb the industrial centres of the Rhineland, thus inviting retaliation on Paris and London, which offer much larger targets. Even if they begin by confining their air attacks to German aerodromes and aircraft factories, the inaccuracy of bombing is such

The Current of War

that the civil population are almost certain to be victims, thus providing justification for German attacks to be more directly aimed at their people. The strategic effect of any such campaign is unlikely to be at all commensurate with the purely wasteful damage suffered by the populations on either side.

Apart from the possibility of some radically new means, real pressure on Germany can only be exerted by the slow process of economic and moral blockade. In the long run it might prove more effective than any military efforts—while its moral effect should be felt all the sooner if France and Britain refrained from such an offensive as would tend to stiffen the fighting spirit of the German people as a whole. It is well to realize, however, that if Russia made war supplies available for Germany, the prospect of economic pressure would be greatly diminished.

The one area where France and Britain might hope for some early material effect in war—and a psychological counterblast to Germany's probable gains in Poland—is in the Mediterranean, against Italy. From this point of view, Italy's entry into the war against us might be better than an unfriendly neutrality which compelled us to keep a large part of our forces there, in readiness, without any compensating result.

If Italy comes into the war, we must anticipate an invasion of the Sudan by her East African forces, which otherwise could only contemplate creeping paralysis as a result of being cut off from home supplies. On the other hand, Italy's overseas possessions in the Mediterranean offer inviting targets. If it would be unwise to expect quick progress from a French invasion of Libya, until the effect of being cut off from munition and petrol supplies had time to make itself felt, there are other places which, because of their isolation and limited accommodation for defending forces, offer a fair chance of success if the necessary local military superiority can be attained to back up the effect

The Prospect in a War over Poland

of sea-power. The best chance is probably afforded in the Dodecanese Islands, especially if the co-operation of Turkey be obtained for the operation. An invasion of Sardinia, from Corsica, is a larger venture which might be practicable, though more difficult, if local air superiority could be achieved. An attempt to land on the Italian mainland would probably be too great a hazard in face of a shore-based air force, and in view of the inherent superiority which this possesses over the inevitably limited aircraft in the carriers of a fleet at sea. For the same reason there would be serious risks to the fleet in carrying out a bombardment of Italian ports. In sum, the opportunities for striking effectively at Italy, although they appear good at first sight, tend to diminish as the problem is studied more closely.

SUMMARY OF THE SITUATION

If the Poles decide to fight rather than accept Hitler's demands, it is clear that they are strategically bound to give up, with only a show of resistance, the territory which he is demanding. And that they will in all probability be forced to yield far more territory than he is demanding. It is also clear that France and Britain can do nothing effective to prevent this loss of territory, while very doubtful whether even the utmost military efforts on their part would avail to regain it for Poland.

Facing these strategic realities soberly, the question should be weighed whether the Polish Government is justified in calling on its subjects to sacrifice themselves for what they are bound to lose in any case, and whether the British and French Governments are justified in encouraging it to fight for what they themselves are unlikely to be able to regain for Poland. Any sacrifice may be better than surrender, but is it worth while if the surrender—of the object for which the war is fought—is seen to be inevitable before fighting begins?

The Current of War

The most probable result of prolonged efforts to restore Poland's territory would be the mutual exhaustion of all the warring countries, with the consequent establishment of Russia's supremacy in Europe. A more immediate danger to France and Britain is that the demonstration of their incapacity to preserve Poland will cause them such a loss of prestige in the eyes of the world that other aggressive-minded countries, now sitting on the fence, may be encouraged to join Germany in a combined effort to conquer and divide up the British and French empires. Such a danger will be increased if Britain and France are led, by the taunts at their incapacity, to throw their forces into an offensive in the west which suffers, as is strategically probable, a costly and unmistakable repulse. At the present time the General Staffs, despite their natural inclination to the offensive, are likely to have recognized its practical impossibility so far as to eschew the intention in their initial plans—but it is only too probable that after a few months of war they will be driven to follow their natural inclination and instinctive optimism by the emotional pressure of a public clamour for us "to do something."

There is nothing more fatal than the instinct to attempt what cannot succeed from the feeling that if it could succeed it would be good.

.

For a long time past, and in each of the crises of recent years, I have urged that we ought to check the aggressive powers—before they became too strong. Against the policy of putting off a stand, I pointed out that as a people we should never be willing to retreat indefinitely, and that the danger I feared was that we should turn about at a time when, as a scientific strategist, one would have to say that the ground was not firm enough to stand on. That situation has been reached. Last March, by our sudden and unconditional guarantee to Poland, we chained our policy to that of

The Prospect in a War over Poland

perhaps the most romantic and least realistic people in Europe. That guarantee was, in a practical sense, incapable of real fulfilment without Russia's military aid. Yet the Poles were allowed to raise obstacles to it.

We have been manœuvred into a thoroughly bad strategic position, whatever the long-term advantages of our superior economic resources. In such a position any sensible strategist does his utmost to postpone battle, and manœuvre afresh with a view to regaining an advantageous position. In the present circumstances, weighing the strategic situation, it would seem wiser to press the Polish Government to *compromise*—as distinct from surrender—with Hitler, pointing out the stark realities of their fate in an immediate war, rather than to be drawn into a struggle which at best only promises to end in futility, and might lead to irreparable disaster. If Hitler shows any inclination to climb down, it would be folly not to provide a ladder.

If it is too late to avert war by these means, the best course would be to base our action on the gradual effect of economic blockade and moral boycott, abstaining from such an offensive, both on land and in the air, as would tend to consolidate the fighting spirit of the German people while exhausting our own resources in a vain effort. To think and talk of "victory" in such a war would be the most dangerous of delusions. In the actual circumstances, the more that our action demonstrates repugnance and the less it resembles pugnacity the more effective it is likely to be, and the best chance it offers of our civilization surviving the issue.

So far as I could judge from the tone of comment, my view of the situation was regarded as unduly pessimistic.

In general, it was all too clear that the long accumulating resentment of Hitler's methods had generated an emotional force too intense for reasoned calculation of the immediate practical factors or consideration of the ultimate prospects. There seemed to be a general unwillingness either to weigh

The Current of War

the odds or to take long views. From the way many leading people spoke it was clear that they were in a state of illusion about the strategic situation, accentuated by their way of considering war in terms of the past ; while even those who had doubts seemed to be resigned to drifting with the current, hoping that it would carry us somehow and somewhere to a safe landing. For my own part, I found it difficult to share such vague hopefulness, having watched the drift so long, and seen the repeated hopes of our leaders as repeatedly proved false.

Rather than see Danzig and the Corridor yielded under threat, they chose to see the whole of Poland lost. Their attitude was a supreme illustration of the proverb about "throwing the baby out with the bath-water." The choice of such a way of "fulfilling our obligations to Poland," and a high-minded rejection of any compromise as dishonourable, showed a strange disregard for the inevitable fate of the people *in* Poland.

When the German threats against Poland were translated into fact on September 1, by the launching of the attack on Poland, it was natural that the feeling of indignation should banish all calculation. The prevailing mood was vividly shown when the House of Commons met on the following day. Mr. Chamberlain outlined the situation, and said that the British Government were bound to take action unless the German forces were withdrawn from Polish territory. He then stated that the British Government were in communication with the French Government "as to the limit of time within which it would be necessary" for them "to know whether the German Government was prepared to effect such a withdrawal."

Thereupon Mr. Greenwood, as acting Leader of the Opposition, rose and said : "I believe the whole House is perturbed by the right hon. gentleman's statement. There is a growing feeling, I believe, in all quarters of the House, that this incessant strain must end sooner or later, and, in a sense, the sooner the better." (Cries of "Now.") He went on to say that he wondered "how long we are prepared to vacillate, at a time when Britain, and all that Britain stands for, and human civilization are in peril." Expressing regret that the Prime Minister had said that we must wait upon our Allies, Mr. Greenwood remarked : "I should have

The Prospect in a War over Poland

preferred the Prime Minister to have been able to say to-night definitely: 'It is either peace or war.' Reminding the House that they were due to meet on the morrow at 12 noon, he expressed the hope that the Prime Minister would be in a position to make some further statement. (Cries of "Definite.") Mr. Greenwood insisted that he must put this point to the Prime Minister: "Every minute's delay now means loss of life, imperilling our national interests"—(Mr. Boothby, 'Honour!') Mr. Greenwood—"Let me finish my sentence. I was about to say imperilling the very foundations of our national honour. And I hope, therefore, that to-morrow morning, however hard it may be to the right hon. gentleman—and no one would care to be in his shoes to-night—we shall know the mind of the British Government, and that there shall be no more devices for dragging out what has been dragged out too long."

Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Leader of the Opposition Liberals, followed Mr. Greenwood. He declared that: "This sitting of the House will not have been held in vain if it has demonstrated to the world that the British Parliament will not tolerate delay in the fulfilment of our honourable obligations to Poland."

Mr. Chamberlain in replying, assured the House that there was not "the slightest weakening in the attitude of either the British or the French Government." He added that: "I anticipate that there is only one answer that I shall have to give the House to-morrow. I hope myself that the issue will be brought to a close at the earliest possible moment, so that we may know where we are."

.

Following the Italian proposal for a conference—which was welcomed, if not inspired, by the French Foreign Office—the French Government, while insisting that the Germans must withdraw, had promised to wait until midday on Sunday, September 3 for a German acceptance of this stipulation—before committing themselves to a declaration of war. The British Government, however, notified the French that they could not delay so long, as this hour, the fulfilment of their pledges to Poland. Accordingly, the British Ambassador in Berlin (Sir Neville Henderson) called on the German Foreign Minister (Herr von Ribbentrop) at 9 a.m. that morning.

The Current of War

presented the British ultimatum, and asked for a reply by 11 a.m. at the latest.

When the House of Commons met at 12 noon, the Prime Minister read out the terms of the British ultimatum, and said that : "No such undertaking was received by the time stipulated, and, consequently, this country is now at war with Germany." He concluded his brief speech by saying : "I trust I may live to see the day when Hitlerism has been destroyed and a liberated Europe has been re-established."

Mr. Greenwood then rose and said : "The atmosphere of this House has changed overnight. Resentment, apprehension, anger, reigned over our proceedings last night—aroused by a fear that delays might end in national dishonour and the sacrifice of the Polish people to German tyranny. These feelings, I have reason to believe, were shared by a large number of people outside, and from messages that have come to me this morning I believe that what I said last night met with the approval of our people. This morning we met in an entirely different atmosphere, one of relief, one of composure, one of resolution. The intolerable agony of suspense from which all of us have suffered is over. We now know the worst. The hated word 'War' has been spoken by Britain, in fulfilment of her pledged word and unbreakable intentions to defend Poland and so to defend the liberties of Europe." He finished with the remark : "May the war be swift and short, and may the peace which follows stand proudly for ever on the shattered ruin of an evil name."

From the volume of cheers which punctuated his speech there could be little doubt that he expressed the general feeling of the House at this historic moment. At the same time, the fact that he could even imagine that Hitler's defeat would be "swift and short," reveals the state of illusion that was prevalent.

CHAPTER X

THE NEED FOR A NEW TECHNIQUE

(September 9, 1939)

During the first week of war, while the unreality of the promises "to defend Poland" was being tragically demonstrated, I was pondering the problem of how the consequences might be retrieved. From a military point of view no gleam of light could be seen. The deeper one probed the problem, the harder it was to see any solution along such lines. The more carefully one weighed the factors, the more clearly adverse was the military balance. Prolonged reflection brought me to certain conclusions as to the only possible solution that might offer a fair prospect. These were outlined in the following memorandum—which was sent to a somewhat wider circle than the previous paper.

CAN WE "CRUSH HITLERISM"?—OR SHOULD WE DEVELOP A NEW TECHNIQUE TO CHECK AND UNDERMINE IT?

(September 9, 1939)

A. THE PROBLEM

THE first week of the war has already seen the fulfilment of the forecast that the Poles would "in all probability be forced to yield far more territory than Hitler is demanding." So rapidly have they yielded it, that there must be a doubt whether their morale will hold out and enable them to consolidate the defences of their central zone of resistance.

What is the problem now? If Hitler makes an offer of peace, will the Western Allies refuse it? If they do, how will they conduct the war?

The Current of War

The Germans will enjoy the advantage of the defensive—on a short and very strong line in the west. Are the Allies going to press the offensive here? If they do, it is difficult to see that they can do more than grind themselves to pieces against it. In the last war we nearly wrecked the British Army by driving into the morass of Passchendaele, and the result was that when it was exhausted the Germans were able to break through the British front and come dangerously close to winning the war—which they could not otherwise have had a chance of doing. Are we now going to push the British Empire into a vaster Passchendaele?

This seems to be the growing trend of many expressions of opinion here as to the policy we should pursue. There are, indeed, ominous signs of a Balaclava-like mood. The "Charge of the Light Brigade" was foolish enough as minor tactics, but would be far worse in the sphere of grand strategy. "C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre."

That was a Frenchman's comment—and it would be wise to reckon with the possibility that the French, a realistic people, may prove unwilling to lend themselves for long to an offensive strategy aimed to recover someone else's territory, already lost and lying far behind the fortified barrier which faces them. If the French should decline to continue such an unpromising effort, of which they would have to bear the brunt, the position in which we should be placed would be both dangerous and ridiculous.

Even if France should agree to continue, there is the further risk to be considered that if we insist on pursuing the war with a view to a *future* offensive against Germany, the impression made by her *present* success against Poland may encourage other Powers, lying around our flanks, to join with her in a concerted threat to the French and ourselves. The more that we exhaust ourselves in *military* effort the less capable we shall be of resisting such an enveloping pressure.

In sum, by making our stand on ground that was strategically unsound we have got into a very bad hole—perhaps the

The Need for a New Technique

worst in our history. It is not easy to see a way out, but at least it should be clear that the harder we push in a military sense the deeper we are likely to get.

B. A POSSIBLE SOLUTION

In this war we are trying to deal with an essentially new problem by applying an out-of-date technique. If we are to attain our object—the preservation of British civilization by the sterilization of Nazi aggressive power—without exhausting ourselves, we must develop a new technique suited to the conditions of this war.

In exploring the problem, the first need is to be clear as to the nature of the new conditions. One of these is the superiority of defence over attack in any area where the density of force to space is such as to allow *no room for manœuvre*, and where the forces are generally similar in *scale and type* of equipment.

A second new condition is the growth of long-range bombing forces, and the consequent vast extension of the war zone, which has the result that the normal life of the people has to be carried on under the ever-present possibility of interruption—and this means that the psychological strain of war is greatly multiplied compared with the past.

A third new condition is the obvious lack of any enthusiasm for war among the *majority* of the people in every country—a state of mind which in Germany has been accentuated by years of privation. There may be a spirit of resigned determination in defence, but there is little or no sign of ardour for attack anywhere.

The next step is to take account of the points of strength and weakness in our own situation. The most obvious weakness is the strategic difficulty of making any effective attack on Germany in the west—with its narrow and highly fortified front. This is accentuated by the fact that the balance, not only of trained, but of potential, man-power, is on Germany's side. There would seem to be no prospect

The Current of War

of the British and French developing such a superiority as would enable them to attain real success in the offensive—while the harder they try the more they are likely to consolidate the German people in resistance, for a time at any rate.

An air offensive is likely to produce a great deal of mutual damage, but there is little reason to expect from it a decisive effect—at any rate unless the present scale of air forces can be much further increased on our side without a corresponding increase on the German side, so that we can become paramount in the air. Another point of weakness is our dependence on overseas communications for the supplies necessary to maintain the nation's life, as well as to carry on the war. We have also to take account of the definite risk that, if we exhaust our forces, the powers at present neutral who lie around our far-stretched flanks, may be tempted to throw their weight into the struggle, against us.

The first of our points of strength is our naval superiority, although this is dependent on keeping our naval strength as far as possible intact ; it might easily be jeopardized if we were to expose it to attack by an enemy's shore-based aircraft at close quarters. A second point of our strength lies in our economic resources. A third lies in the fact that our people are starting the war in a comparatively well-fed and unstrained state compared with the Germans. A fourth lies in the apathetic mood of a large part of the German people—although this may produce a surprising capacity for numbed resistance. A fifth lies in the extent of world sympathy with our action in defending the weak against aggression—although this may be weakened if we should come to appear to be the attacker, and to be pursuing the aim of crushing Germany.

Confidence in the rightness of our motives should not blind us to the way it may be interpreted abroad as an attempt to crush a rival rather than to uphold international justice—nor to the opportunities offered for fostering such

The Need for a New Technique

an interpretation. Much play will be made with the reasonable elements in the German case over Danzig and the Corridor, and the intransigence of the Poles in earlier discussions. Emphasis will be given to Mussolini's statement that while both the Germans and the French were agreeable to his proposals for a truce on September 1, we rejected them—and it will be argued, with some reason, that our demand that the German troops should not merely halt, but actually withdraw, was obviously impossible for any ruler to accept without losing "face." From this will proceed the argument that we were determined to make war inevitable. Already there are signs that neutral opinion is being adversely affected by such arguments. And the effect may be greatly increased if Germany should be clever enough to offer peace terms which have an air of moderation and thus throw on us the responsibility of transforming a plausibly limited "rectification" of frontiers into a struggle *à outrance*. If we reject such terms, and acquire the appearance of being the attacking side against a Germany keeping the defensive, the tendency of neutrals to blame us is likely to increase—since they have a natural desire to see a return to settled conditions.

Another factor to be weighed is the strain of a protracted war on our own people—and the ultimate effects of such a strain. The last war, where air power was in its infancy, imposed a far lighter kind of strain than is probable in this—yet reduced the German people to a lasting state of insanity, while disturbing our own stability. Those who argue that this war must be pursued until "victory" is gained, however long it takes, show inadequate regard to the very real risk that all the warring peoples may lose their balance in the effort. In trying to "destroy Hitlerism," European civilization itself might be destroyed beyond repair. For our only hope in an early-closing of the common slaughter-house would lie in the German people's will and capacity to throw off their Nazi shackles—and this is such an

The Current of War

incalculable factor that, in default of any reasonable military grounds for expecting a result in the west, it hardly justifies gambling the future of the British people on the chance. Such gambles are not in accord with our *past* tradition of statesmanship.

On weighing these factors as a whole, the conclusion is forced on one that to follow the conventional practice of warfare and pursue a *military* offensive against Germany, would be the most unwise strategy and policy from every point of view. We cannot expect any adequate results from it, at any rate for a very long time. In these circumstances, it is likely to have numerous ill effects without compensating benefit. For a time it will tend to stiffen the spirit of resistance in Germany and consolidate her people. The harder we press it the more we shall use up our reserves of strength, military, economic, and human. The more time that passes without showing any adequate results, the more will an impression of our weakness spread, not only in Germany, but throughout the world.

It would therefore seem wise to abstain even from the appearance of attempting what we cannot expect to achieve—and make it clear that we are not intending, nor pretending, to conduct the defence of civilization in this old-fashioned way. The present idea of making a carefully limited offensive in the west, while we are in the process of building up our forces, will husband our strength, but will not avoid the other ill effects of an actual unsuccessful offensive.

A declaration that we were renouncing military attack as a means of combating aggression would be a far-sighted move, strengthening our moral position, while forestalling the otherwise probable growth of derision abroad and disillusionment here. It might well be the first point in the development of a new technique of war, suited to present conditions and our particular circumstances. It would set us free to develop economic and moral pressure to the

The Need for a New Technique

utmost, and to make the best disposition of our military forces to meet any German attempt to break our "sanitary cordon." It would throw on the Germans the responsibility of taking the offensive, with all its disadvantages.

In grand strategy, as in strategy and tactics, the guiding principle should be to avoid striking at the enemy's strong points, and press on his weak points, while covering our own weak points. This principle has been skilfully applied by Germany in the past three years of "camouflaged war," with the result that she has consistently out-manceuvred her opponents. And now, when we have been driven to offer battle, we have been led to do so in a most disadvantageous position. The best hope of extricating ourselves and regaining the advantage, lies in applying the same principle—concentrating against the opponent's weak flank and "refusing" our own—in the grand strategic sense. This clearly implies an avoidance of offensive military action in the west, combined with the utmost economic and psychological pressure.

CHAPTER XI

FACING THE PROBLEM

(An unpublished article)

THIS war has thrown into relief the changing form of warfare, if there is not yet much sign that the full significance of the change has been appreciated. What has happened in the military sphere, the more obvious aspect, should at least have served to explode the fallacy of numbers—that theory of human mass which dominated the military mind of Europe from the French Revolution until the end of the last war.

In terms of man power, the Polish Army was a formidable opponent. To statesmen who persisted in making their calculations on that traditional basis, it may well have seemed that Poland should be capable of holding out for a long time against a German invasion. The yearly numbers of her population attaining military age had become larger than those of France. Even though shortage of equipment prevented her training the full number available her peace-time army nevertheless comprised the equivalent of 37 divisions compared with the estimated 52 of the Germany Army. If the French strength was added to that of the Poles, the two together would have a numerical superiority over the German, and although it was expected that the latter would be doubled on mobilization, a similar increase was probable on the other side.

But the favourable picture presented by any such apparent balance of power was essentially a false one. Bulk was not weight in modern times. The effective weight of the Polish Army was diminished by its inferior equipment, while its

Facing the Problem

mobile arm was largely composed of cavalry "padding," which was not likely to withstand the armoured thrust of German tanks. And this qualitative handicap was increased by the fact that Poland's forces were outclassed in the air. Furthermore, the nominal weight of the allied forces was seriously diminished by strategic discounts.

The main determining factors in modern war on land are the *relative weapon power* and the *ratio of force to space*. With the growing power of weapons, the capacity of a well-armed force to dominate the ill-armed masses of a non-industrial country has become greater than ever, whereas between forces of similar standard the mutual growth of weapon power tends to cancel out in such a way as to produce a stalemate. And the greater the common density of force to the operational frontage the sooner the deadlock is likely to develop. Where the two sides are equally matched in armament, and air support, experience has shown that the attacker needs at least a three to one superiority of force—reckoned not in numbers of men but in modern "power-units"—unless the front is so long and the defending force so thinly spread as to allow room to exert a manœuvring leverage against the flanks of the defending units.

Unfortunately, Poland's frontiers were extraordinarily long in proportion to her forces. They stretched nearly 3500 miles, of which some 2000 miles faced German or German-controlled territory. This geographical situation presented an attacker with immense scope for manœuvre, and it was all the worse because of the encircled contour of the frontier and the awkward protrusion presented by the "Corridor." Further, the manœuvring power of the attacker was enhanced by mechanization, while the difficulties of the defence of "interior lines" were increased by the poorness of internal communications. There was, indeed, no theatre in Europe where an offensive by modern forces appeared to have so favourable a prospect.

The Current of War

By contrast the Franco-German frontier was, next to the mountainous Franco-Italian frontier, the most unfavourable of all. For the German frontier facing France was only 200 miles long, of which 70 miles were covered by the Rhine and the remainder of the Siegfried Line. The narrowness of space frustrated any possibility of manœuvre, while fortification multiplied the inherent advantage of defending forces. In consequence, a relief offensive by Poland's allies in the west had no real prospect of effect—even if they had had the margin of force available to justify them in pressing the effort.

Since it has been suggested that they might at least have sent aircraft to compensate Poland's inferiority in the air, it may be worth pointing out, first, that they had no such margin of air force beyond their own essential needs as could have enabled them to provide a reinforcement adequate in the circumstances; second, that it is useless to despatch aircraft without the large ground organization and spare-part service necessary to maintain them in operation; third, that the geographical remoteness of Poland was such that the types of machine most necessary to redress Poland's weakness could only have been sent before the war began—in other words at a time when the prospect of Russian reinforcements in emergency seemed to make this unnecessary. It is well, also, to realize that if any air contingent had been sent, it would now be irretrievably lost, to the serious weakening of the forces which the Western Powers have for their own defence.

In sum, the strategic situation which faced us in the attempt to aid Poland was more unfavourable than perhaps any with which we have had to deal in fulfilling past continental commitments. And it is only fair to remark that throughout the months preceding the crisis our leading soldiers showed a realistic appreciation of the difficulties of the problem which should, in historical retrospect, discountenance any criticism of their part in contributing to

Facing the Problem

the situation which has emerged from the opening months of the war.

The problem as it now stands has been greatly complicated by Russia's occupation of the eastern half of Poland. The ultimate effect of our prospects is likely to depend on how far, and how soon, the realities arising from that fact are grasped here. Whatever views may have been entertained as to the possibility of eventually releasing Poland from Germany's grip, no one in their senses can seriously think that it would be possible for Britain and France to recover by force of arms, from both Germany and Russia, the two halves of Poland which they hold. The more such an idea is manifested here the more closely will these two Great Powers be urged into closer association, to the consequent frustration of the influence our sea power might otherwise exert, and with potentially wider ill-effects.

If, by wise statesmanship, the German part of the problem can be detached, we are still left with the question how this can be met. If the Germans take the offensive in the west, the problem will be simplified. Such action, if undertaken, would suggest that their economic situation is worse, and their prospects of supply from Russia less, than they would have us believe. It would thus provide reason for a strengthened belief here in the capacity of France and Britain to withstand, and eventually exhaust, Germany's power of attack.¹ On the other hand, our problems will inevitably become much more difficult, and the prospects more remote, if Germany should continue to remain on the defensive in the west. Indeed, the more one explores the problem, and the more carefully one weighs the actual and potential balance of forces, the more difficult it becomes to visualize any

¹ When this was written, the number of divisions which the Germans could have deployed for an autumn offensive in the West was little more than the combined French and British total. By the following spring, the German strength was almost doubled, while the Allied strength showed an insignificant increase. Following the rejection of Hitler's peace offer in October, and the Allies' affirmation of their intention to seek a military victory, the development of the Germans' armed strength was greatly accelerated.

The Current of War

adequate effect from an Allied offensive, either at an early date or within a reasonable period. And it would be wise to remember the lesson of all experience that the capacity of even the resolute people to continue an apparently vain effort is not illimitable. Because of the more widespread strain of modern warfare, the potential duration of effort is likely to be less than in the past—thus, as between two more or less evenly matched sides, weighting the scales against that which expends most effort in pursuing a dream of “victory.”

In these circumstances it is worth pausing to consider whether there is not a fundamental mistake in seeking to fulfil our object along traditional military lines. Could we not find a method better adapted to the actual conditions, and less conducive to our own exhaustion?

Our true object is to cure Hitlerism. Even if it were possible to crush the German forces, experience should have shown us that a long-drawn-out physical process of “killing Germans” is not a cure for what is, essentially, a psychological disease. By comparison with the dim, and dark prospects which it offers, there is at least a better promise in developing the potentialities of a policy of non-intercourse, in the widest and fullest sense. A cool estimate of the situation should indicate that there is far more to gain than to lose from a definite renunciation of military action as the means to our end. This would consolidate our moral position, fixing more clearly than ever on the Germans the blood guilt which they are trying to transfer to us, and forestalling the probable tendency of neutrals to blame us, if devastation spreads. It would also transfer to their shoulders the onus of taking the offensive, with all the practical handicaps and self-exhausting effects that await any Great Power which attempts a *direct* assault on its peers. Hitherto, by clever diplomatic manoeuvring, Germany has kept us dancing and panting in her wake. We have now an opportunity, perhaps the last, of calling the

Facing the Problem

tune—if we can recover our balance of judgment and realize that the old-style martial song is not attuned to present conditions.

Early in October I wrote a further article, for another paper, elaborating the theme of my memorandum of September 9. Although written by request, its publication was first postponed, and then turned down—as too discordant with the general view of, and belief in, the prospects of early victory. Not until two months later was I able to publish a modified version of the article—in the *Sunday Express* of December 10.

This was a general experience during the early months of the war. There was a great demand for comment on the war combined with a reluctance to publish anything that might convey the difficulties of the Allies' situation. Such an attitude was natural—if short-sighted. For history teaches the lesson that it never pays to hide hard facts from those who will have to face them.

It is of sombre interest to recall that even when I was able to publish in the British Press the articles which are reproduced in the next section of this book—articles in which I could at least present a reasonably true picture of the difficulties of the problem, if not its dangers—they were suppressed by the French censorship. For in France the official attitude seemed to be that the less ground there was for a belief in decisive victory, the more important it was to express such a belief. Officialdom, however, failed to take account of the fact that, because of his military training and natural intelligence, the average Frenchman could work out a simple sum in military arithmetic such as statesmen preferred to ignore.

CHAPTER XII

THE BEST GUARANTEE AGAINST AGGRESSION

This article, based on an earlier memorandum, was written at the time of Mr. Sumner Welles's exploratory visit to Europe in March, 1940—when he met the leading statesmen of the countries concerned in the war. At that time, there was considerable discussion of the possible basis for a peace settlement. Publication of the article, however, was postponed—and then the Scandinavian campaign intervened. But the campaign in the West that followed underlined the significance of the fact that the weapons to which Hitler owed the success of his victories were those which he had expressed a willingness to give up earlier—as part of a mutual disarmament agreement.

IN every discussion of possible peace terms, the question arises: "But how could we trust Hitler's word?" If any peace by agreement were made now, it is argued, he would only keep it as long as it suited his convenience—and would use the interval to prepare a further aggression. In the light of experience that general doubt is easily understandable. And at first sight the question may seem unanswerable.

Yet there is an answer—and Hitler himself has helped to provide it.

It offers a practical assurance essentially different from any verbal promise or written guarantee. Indeed, if peace were a matter of depending on a statesman's word, or on a signature to a treaty, there would never be any period of peace in the world so long as it contained any unsatisfied nations. Peace has mainly depended on the mutual checks

The Best Guarantee against Aggression

provided by the conflicting interests and relative strengths of the various Great Powers. And that has often proved a precarious assurance, since some temporary combination could tilt the balance in favour of war.

But there is available to-day a far firmer guarantee against aggression. It rests on the proved strength of modern defence. It consists of the agreed *abolition* under *mutual supervision* of the heavy weapons which alone make it possible, under present conditions of warfare, for attack to overcome defence.

Recent experience has shown that an attacker needs more than a great superiority of numbers : he requires an immense weight of tanks and bombers, and (against fortifications) heavy artillery—even to overcome the resistance that a small country, adequately equipped with machine-guns and other up-to-date small arms, can put up against an invader.

Once these powerful defence-breaking weapons were abolished by common agreement, the existing superiority of defence over attack, *pari passu*, would become a sealed supremacy. This would establish the inviolability of all the main frontiers of Europe, while even the minor powers would enjoy a degree of security against aggression such as they could not hope for otherwise. For the invasion of a small country would entail a cost to a small-armed if large-size attacker sufficient to make aggression unprofitable, and reinforcement by its neighbours might easily make its defence impregnable.

The history of international discussions on mutual security since the last war yields depressing evidence of human blindness. The nations sought such security in ways that were bound to produce wrangling, and in pacts that inevitably generated suspicion—neglecting the most obvious and simplest means, provided by the basic military lesson of the last war.

Anyone who shared in and reflected on that experience

The Current of War

was bound to recognize the increasing difficulty of the attack in modern warfare. Anyone who studied the problem of disarmament objectively, sincerely desiring to find a solution, could hardly fail to see the way of making it a reality. For my own part, my very conviction as to the power of mechanized forces led me all the quicker to see, and urge, that the most practical scheme of disarmament would be one based on the principle of abolishing the particular weapons on which the offensive depended for any prospect of success. This *qualitative* kind of disarmament, I pointed out, would avoid the inevitable wrangling about numerical ratios, and be far more encouragement than any treaty towards diminishing the scale of armies.

When the Disarmament Conference assembled in February, 1932, this principle was embraced by the British, American, German, Italian, and Russian Governments. The French, who had most to gain by it on a long view, were slower to adopt it, preferring a more comprehensive if also more complicated scheme. Such elaborations tended to delay progress towards a definite agreement, while making it more difficult to reconcile the French and German views of their appropriate scales of strength. Moreover, the military experts of the various countries tended, in their affection for their pet instruments, to obscure the view by quibbling arguments that a distinction could not be drawn between offensive and defensive weapons. Obviously, all weapons are offensive in the sense that they can inflict injury; and all can be useful to the defender as well as to the attacker. But the real point of the qualitative principle is that only the possession of certain heavy weapons makes it possible to carry out a decisive offensive against another country. Without them, aggression would be paralysed.

In our own case, the ironical sequel to the arguments of the technical enthusiasts for preserving bombers and tanks was that seven years later we were far shorter of these than Germany, which formerly had none.

The Best Guarantee against Aggression

As late as April, 1934, a year after Hitler's accession to power, Germany expressed her willingness to enter in an agreement which would limit her to an army of 300,000 men and an air force half the size of the French but without any bombers. But the French still refused to consider any agreement which recognized Germany's *right* of rearmament, although they were not prepared to interfere with the *fact* of it. Thus the Disarmament Conference petered out—and Germany was able the following year to announce the creation of an army larger than the French.

Even so, a more promising note was sounded in May, 1935, when Hitler stated that he was "prepared to agree to any limitation the effect of which is to eliminate weapons specially suited to the purpose of attack." He went on to define these as being, on land, heavy artillery and heavy tanks. In regard to the sea, he would agree to any limitation on the size of warships and the calibre of guns, together with either the limitation or abolition of submarines. As for air warfare, he suggested the prohibition of bomb-dropping "outside the actual battle zone," as a preliminary step "pending the complete international outlawing of bombing altogether." The form of his proposals, he said, was based on the view that the only practicable way of progress towards disarmament was "along the lines of gradual abolition and outlawing of instruments and forms of war which are essentially incompatible with the Geneva Convention already in existence."

That conclusion coincided with my own, and in comment on the proposals I urged the importance of sparing no effort to translate them into a definite agreement—all the more so, because they would offer the surcest check possible on any aggressive designs which he might contemplate in the future.

In the light of subsequent experience, the other countries would have had far more to gain than to lose by embracing the opportunity thus offered. For without the superiority

The Current of War

in tanks and heavy artillery which Germany attained by 1938, and without the threat of being able to bomb Prague and other cities, she would have been unable to procure the surrender of Czecho-Slovakia. Without these weapons, too, she would hardly have produced the collapse of Poland. Likewise, Russia could not have battered a way through the Mannerheim Line.

It may be thought that Hitler's lack of these weapons in 1935 was the reason why he thus proposed their abolition. But it is worth special note that at the end of his speech of October 6 last, after the defeat of Poland, he renewed his proposal for a general disarmament agreement apparently on the same lines. It seemed by far the most promising point of his peace proposals, but it passed almost unnoticed in the Allied countries.

It will be said, of course, that we could not rely on any agreement which Hitler made. But the unique value of a disarmament agreement for the abolition of the main offensive weapons is that, once they are abolished, it constitutes a practical guarantee that does not depend on any Government's word. Evasion is possible with other forms of disarmament—budgetary expenditure may be camouflaged, number of troops can be discreetly increased. By contrast, the banning of heavy guns and tanks is likely to prove an effective ban. The manufacture and test of such bulky machines, the training of crews for them, and the necessary tactical exercises with them, form a multiple process that would be almost impossible to conceal. It thereby provides its own inherent check on secret evasion.

Thus should Hitler show any disposition to offer peace terms that are acceptable in other respects, there would be no need to worry about the question of guarantees against fresh aggression if he will agree to the practical fulfilment of his own disarmament proposals.

PART IV

THE LULL BEFORE THE STORM

CHAPTER XIII

CHANGING THE WAR MINISTER

Late on Friday, January 5, 1940, an announcement was issued from No. 10 Downing Street that Mr. Leslie Hore-Belisha had resigned the office of Secretary of State for War and been replaced by Mr. Oliver Stanley, the President of the Board of Trade. It was made known that Mr. Hore-Belisha's resignation followed on his refusal of a transfer to Mr. Stanley's former post. Next day I was asked by the Editor of the *Sunday Chronicle*, Mr. James Drawbell, to comment on these developments. As time was short, the comment had to be written quicker than I should have wished.

HORE-BELISHA'S RESIGNATION

DURING the spring and summer there were frequent reports in military circles as to differences of opinion, more over ways than over means, between Mr. Hore-Belisha and the ruling soldiers. Such differences were allayed by the outbreak of war and the re-shuffle which then took place. Reports of fresh differences have revived in recent weeks, so that Friday's dramatic developments did not come altogether as a surprise.

But Mr. Hore-Belisha's removal from the War Office has come as a shock to the public. Ministers who achieve great constructive reforms have been rare in British history, especially in the last generation. Most rare of all have been those who carried out reforms while presiding over the War Office. During the past century only three Ministers have established their reputation by progress achieved there—which may be evidence of the Army's

The Current of War

inherent resistance to reform, or of the infrequency of dynamic minds among Britain's political leaders. These three big reorganizations took place at approximately equal intervals—a third of a century apart. Another interesting point in common was that all were carried out by Liberal ministers, though in the last case not belonging to a Liberal Government. The first was by Cardwell, who came into office in 1868; the second by Haldane, beginning from 1905; the third by Hore-Belisha, when he became Secretary of State for War in 1937. None of these three statesmen had much knowledge of military affairs when they took over the reins—less, indeed, than many War Ministers who failed to achieve any real improvement. But they were alike in having open minds, a power of logical thought, and a desire for efficiency. They were keen to gather ideas, and to forward the fulfilment of those which seemed reasonable.

Within a few months of coming into office Mr. Hore-Belisha had carried through numerous beneficial changes and had adopted a far-reaching programme of reform, embracing not only the improvement of soldiers' conditions, but the structural organization and strategic distribution of the forces. Like his famous predecessors, he met stiff opposition in the War Office, reinforced by powerful support in high quarters outside. Chafing at the delays thus caused, in view of the urgency of the national situation, he secured permission to rejuvenate the Army Council. After these changes of personnel, made at the end of 1937, the glass appeared set fair for rapid progress towards the fulfilment of the programme. But that appearance was to some extent delusory. While he had stirred up the inevitable resentments which accompany any such change, and incurred the odium of having made a drastic "purge," he was to suffer at the same time from not having gone far enough. Instead of a partial infusion, he would perhaps have been wiser to ensure that the control posts of the

Changing the War Minister

official machine were completely refilled with the most progressive elements in the Army. He was to suffer from delays and hindrances, and to learn that those who show agreement without real conviction can often cause more check than a declared opponent—especially when fortified by the realization that a change of staff once made cannot be soon repeated.

Nor was the fault all on one side. The Minister had bold vision, but, naturally, not the grasp of practical detail which comes from long study of problems. Just as with some of the reforms he was apt to accept the shadow for the substance, so he was sometimes inclined to brush aside real difficulties instead of finding a way of solving them. As time passed, his increasing eagerness to paddle his own canoe carried him on to rocks which might have been avoided.

Nevertheless, the credit balance of his tenure at the War Office far exceeds the debit. In two years of office he achieved more in the way of reform and development than had been carried out in the generation before, or in any generation. It thus seems the more regrettable that the services of a man of such rare energy should be lost to the nation at this critical time.

The following week I was asked by the Editor of the *Sunday Express*, Mr. John Gordon, to deal at more length with the background to this eventful change.

THE BACKGROUND TO HORE-BELISHA'S REMOVAL

It is natural that Mr. Hore-Belisha's removal from the office of Secretary of State for War should have created astonishment throughout the world. No other minister in this generation has had a comparable record of constructive achievement. Indeed, in the sphere of the Army there have been only two others in a century whose work has had a similar effect in contributing to progress and efficiency,

The Current of War

There has been a bewildering variety of explanations of the cause, sometimes contradictory. In one quarter Mr. Hore-Belisha is described as having had little enthusiasm for conscription; in another, as having been mainly responsible for its introduction. Some papers have emphasized his readiness to meet French desires for an increasingly large British Army in France, while others have cited the opposite view.

But most of the English papers tend to the view that the trouble lay in a conflict of personalities rather than of policies, and has developed from an accumulation of differences rather than focussing in a single issue. This explanation is probably nearest the mark.

The root of his offence has been that he wrought changes in an institution which instinctively resents change, even though most of its members may appreciate the benefits produced. They are apt to put the expression of that resentment first. They may meet the demands of common gratitude by laying wreaths on the grave of the reformer—but they will ensure that it is on the grave, metaphorically speaking, and that he is dead, at least as a potential source of further changes. Anyone who gives himself to the task of army reform needs to be a philosopher, with a strong sense of humour and of history. It is not an inviting prospect for a man of high political ambitions.

Contact with the military hierarchy is a liberal education in philosophy. During my own service, as a young officer, I was on the whole very fortunate in my experience of generals, though often puzzled at the way in which the mere fact of having earned the good opinion of one of them seemed a sure introduction to the initial disfavour of another, belonging to a different set or school of ideas. But my experience became more extensive after I had been invalided from the Army and became a military critic. I was often to recall the friendly warning of my old chief, wise among his kind—"You'll soon learn, like Repington did, that we

Changing the War Minister

generals are as sensitive as *prima donnas* ! ” It gave a new point to the soldiers’ contention that war is an art and not a science.

Another feature which used to puzzle me during my service was that, despite the strength of the prejudice encircling each ring, and their readiness to remark each others’ faults, they were at one in denouncing the “ politician ” as the cause of every fault in the Army’s organization and operations. It did not seem quite logical. Nonetheless, respecting my superiors’ superior knowledge, I felt there must be ample ground for such a unanimous verdict. It was only when I came to explore the history of the war in its records that I was gradually brought to increasing doubts of this simple explanation of the common root of all military errors.

To those who would understand the present situation a study of the history of the last war may be useful. For the less sign there is that it has arisen from any fundamental disagreement on principle, the more likely it is to represent another innings in the unending match “ soldiers *v.* statesmen ”—of which it might be said that the frequency with which the latter return to the pavilion is more often due to the wicket-keeping than to the bowling of the former. But against a big-hitting batsman they use an under-arm spin which can be very effective on some of the pitches in Whitehall and Mayfair.

This reflection leads to a further one. I have heard innumerable soldiers castigate Mr. Lloyd George for saying in his *Memoirs* the same thing, but less sweepingly, that they say among themselves about other soldiers. When listening to generals, especially of the last war, I have often felt that if one took as exact the sum of their evidence about each other, one would have to assume that all generals were fools or worse. There is no class where personal criticism is less balanced. And there is a risk that it may be taken more seriously, outside, than is meant.

The Current of War

This tendency to conversational overstatement may be a natural reaction from the suppression of open criticism which the authoritarian system and the military code require. It is fostered by the extreme emphasis on loyalty which is current in the Services. This quality, essential to meet the stresses of action, too easily degenerates into a class-loyalty—into military “trade unionism.” Those who are most drastic in private comment on their predecessors and contemporaries will rally as one man to form a common front along a mental Maginot Line if a civilian, especially if he be a “politician,” makes a similar criticism.

This does not imply that the criticisms are always well-founded, in either case, but that the sensitivity is such that when they come from “outside” the reaction tends to focus on the *fact* of the criticism rather than on its *truth*. As a result, even a question is apt to be construed as an accusation.

This puts a heavy handicap on any endeavour towards progress and the adaptation of the military system to new conditions. Nevertheless, a good deal may be achieved indirectly by suggestion and persuasion over a long period of time. For there is plenty of practical intelligence among the officers of the Army, and many of them have good reason to realize the need of progress, at any rate before they reach the summits of the War Office.

Unfortunately, when Mr. Hore-Belisha came into office in 1937 the international situation allowed no time for such gradual methods. Too long had the overhaul of our defences been neglected. Thus although almost every one of the steps he took in quick succession was welcome to a vast majority of soldiers, each of them was disturbing to a section. And the inevitably rapid accumulation of these aggrieved sections became a formidable sum. Like the effect of a succession of pebbles dropped into a pond, a series of ripples went spreading outwards in widening circles of adverse whisper. It is a bold man who ventures to disturb the smooth surface of the official Serpentine.

Changing the War Minister

Not least among the causes of offence was Mr. Hore-Belisha's insistence on giving the pick of Territorial officers a larger opportunity to fill commands in the Territorial Army, in fulfilment of Haldane's original intention when that citizen force was organized. When, some ten years ago, a war-experienced Territorial officer of much distinction was strongly recommended for command of one of the *fourteen* Territorial divisions, his appointment was successfully resisted on the ground that it would diminish the professional prospects of Regular soldiers! It was left to Mr. Hore-Belisha to honour Haldane's promise—after thirty years. He overruled the vested interests, where there was obviously a Territorial officer available of outstanding merit—although the subterfuges employed to defeat his purpose were almost unbelievable.

Another complaint against him was that, at a time when the Army was being mechanized, he tried to ensure that officers who had studied the problems of mechanization should be utilized. He failed to secure that any officer with such experience should be given charge of the first mechanized division, on its formation in 1937, but at least obtained the appointment to the General Staff of an officer thus qualified, by modern knowledge, to direct training. In so doing he did not attempt to dictate the selection of any particular officer, but merely required that the responsible soldiers should choose whichever of the officers with mechanized experience they considered most suitable. His obviously reasonable stipulation was eventually conceded only to be reversed subsequently, under the partially new regime—the solitary expert in mechanized warfare being transferred overseas at the first convenient opportunity.

Here we are brought to the question of the changes in the Army Council which were made in December, 1937, the chief one being the retirement of the existing Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Cyril Deverell, and his replacement by Lord Gort, who two months earlier had

The Current of War

become Military Secretary to the Secretary of State. The odium of making these changes inevitably fell on Mr. Hore-Belisha. They placed in power some considerably younger generals who belonged to what may be described as the "moderate conservative" school.

The infusion was good so far as it went, but, for the rapid fulfilment of a far-reaching scheme of reform, it might have been easier to get the necessary impetus if the new regime had been more widely representative, embracing the most progressive elements. These naturally tend to be the truest supporters of a reforming minister. On the other hand, where there is any tendency to an innate conservatism, nothing is more apt to develop it than sudden accession to authority.

Thus the Secretary of State did not find things altogether easier in the New Year. He had to meet pressure on two fronts, and in July, 1938, his position was impaired by the Sandys case. In the autumn it was seriously endangered by the revelation of the palpable defects and deficiencies in our anti-aircraft defences which were brought by the September crisis. Here he suffered for yielding to, rather than for overruling, his professional advisers.

Although it was not easy to restore public confidence, a renewed display of energy on his part made a growing impression, and by the time he came to present the new Estimates his position with the public was re-established almost as strongly as it had been a year before.

But in official circles, depreciation and criticism continued. The criticism was not without justification on certain points, if the depreciation was unjust to the sum of what he had accomplished under difficulties. But the very qualities and characteristics which had enabled him to succeed in overcoming obstacles and obstruction, where a long series of predecessors had failed, offered an inviting target to those who sought one.

The approach of war brought a new prospect to his

Changing the War Minister

definite opponents as well as to those who vaguely resented the exercise of authority in the military sphere by a man for whom war was not a profession. Even before the storm broke over Europe, fresh rumblings of military thunder were heard in Whitehall. It was being said that "If war comes it will give us a chance to get rid of Hore-Belisha."

On the outbreak of war Lord Gort went to France as Commander-in-Chief of our forces there and Sir Edmund Ironside became Chief of the Imperial General Staff. For a time things seemed easier. But in December reports were current that trouble had arisen over questions that Mr. Hore-Belisha had put, after the visit of the Dominion ministers to France, as to the state of the defences there. The matter did not seem very serious in itself, but it may have been the culminating point of a long drawn-out process—the point where a match was put to the powder trail.

When I spoke of this issue as not seeming "very serious in itself," I meant that a difference of opinion as to the measures necessary to place the British defences in a proper state ought not to give rise to serious dispute between those who shared the responsibility for such preparations. Naturally, I was anxious to avoid saying anything which might give the enemy a hint that the defences along the Franco-Belgian frontier were in an unsatisfactory state.

CHAPTER XIV

ANALYSIS OF THE WAR

This was written for the *Evening Standard* of February 3, 1940. It was based on an estimate of the prospect compiled in November, but perforce omitted the section of this paper which dealt with "the possible ways in which an adverse decision might be reached." Any scientific examination of the problem had to take account of the possibilities of an Allied defeat, although the conclusions, naturally, could not be included in any summary subsequently published.

While endeavouring to present a correct balance sheet, which would foster no illusions on our side about the situation, I was inevitably handicapped by the necessity of avoiding any matter which might indicate the inadequacy of our measures to meet the German offensive, and thus encourage the enemy to attempt such a stroke. In these difficult circumstances, it seemed to me best to place the emphasis on the factors which forbade any practical prospect of our taking the offensive effectively in the West, while abstaining from comment on our chances of successful resistance to a German offensive. Thereby it might be possible to give our people a clearer understanding of the odds against us—especially in air and mechanized force, as I indicated—without weakening their confidence in the Allies' capacity for defence. This inherent handicap, of which I was very conscious, should be borne in mind when reading the present chapter and the chapters which immediately follow.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN'S survey of the war on Wednesday gave a partial account of the way our armed strength is growing. It included some impressive figures. Taking, first, the Army, he stated that we have over one and a quarter million men under arms at home and overseas.

Analysis of the War

The output of guns, and also of shells, had been doubled within the five months since the war began ; and it is already ten times as great as it was after the same period of the last war. The significance of this comparison might have been emphasized by pointing out that at the end of 1914 we had some two million men under arms—with only a tenth of the munitions necessary to make them effective for war. If this is a reminder of the high scale of equipment now required, and of the inevitably greater cost, it implies that our military expansion this time has been much better proportioned, that the standard of instruction received by the " New Army " of 1940 is likely to be much higher than in 1914, and that the troops who take the field will not be exposed to bombardment without means of reply as were their predecessors. There should be no repetition of the experience of 1915 when the British forces covering the path to the Channel ports were rationed to two shells per gun per day.

As for the Air Force, a new necessity of war which was barely foreshadowed by the tiny Flying Corps of 1914, the Prime Minister combined discretion with some indirect indication of its growth by mentioning that the labour force employed in its production is higher than it was at the peak of our output in the last war, and seven times higher than four years ago. The promise of future quantity is backed by the proof of present quality that the actual experience of the war has provided. If it can never be true of any standard attained that " it leaves nothing to be desired," and though the technical balance of aircraft superiority has always been apt to shift from one country to another as new types come into production, those reflections do not diminish the real measure of encouragement furnished by the recent months of test between our machines and the Germans'.

It is at sea, however, that the relative position has received far and away the fullest test. And the evidence here has been proportionately encouraging. This is all the more

The Current of War

important, because for us the sea is the most vital sphere of operations, not only for our capacity to sustain war but for our very existence. If our losses have not been light in total tonnage, they have been light in comparison with what had to be reckoned as a reasonable *possibility* by any calculation which took due account of the development of new means of commerce-attack. When viewing the naval war it is easy to overlook the inherent difficulties of our strategic situation. These are less obvious than the scale of our Navy or the advantage of our geographical location as a giant breakwater astride the exit from Germany's harbours. Some prominent American war critics have been led by surface appearances, and their natural bias towards the offensive, to overestimate the performances of the German naval forces and to extol their offensiveness to the disparagement of our "defensive" strategy. Such critics are so much in love with a theory that they do not pause to weigh up the practical conditions. They overlook the fact that a navy whose battle-fleet must evade battle, and whose shipping has been driven off the seas, must fall back on guerrilla warfare, and in that kind of warfare can naturally enjoy an advantage—as it has no sea-traffic to protect. But, in a realistic estimate of the situation, the surprise of the war hitherto has not been the amount of damage that Germany has inflicted, but the amount she has failed to inflict.

Since any scientific student of war is labelled a "pessimist" by the wishful thinkers who predominate in any country at war, that judgment may perhaps carry some weight with the more rational sceptics at home and abroad.

It is only just to recognize the strain which Germany's guerrilla strategy at sea has put upon our naval resources, and our seamen—whether belonging to the Royal Navy or to the Mercantile Marine. But far worse must be the strain upon the German submarine crews who have to carry out the campaign against our well-guarded shipping routes.

Analysis of the War

In post-war discussion with some of the German U-boat officers of the last war I got a vivid impression of what it meant, even before air counter-action was developed. From this it is easy to understand why, after the submarine losses suffered in the opening months, there has been such a long interval before Wednesday's fresh attack on a convoy—in which one British ship was sunk, but the submarine also. While it would be foolish to discount the possibility of further new means of commerce-attack, there is ground for confidence in the proved limitations of the means hitherto tried.

This survey of the situation as it stands brings us to the problem ahead. Capacity for resistance is not enough to solve it, unfortunately, owing to the circumstances in which the war arose. We have not merely to provide a deterrent to further aggression, but to find a way of redeeming the consequences of past aggression as far as possible.

One way, the obvious one, is by decisive victory. The choice of it depends on the question of its possibility, and also on whether the ultimate prospect is likely to justify the effort. An alternative way is to produce the conviction in your opponents that a timely, and mutually agreeable, settlement is to their interest as much as yours, and that they have more to lose than to gain by continuing the war.

The value of the strength which we are building up depends, first, on the purpose for which it is to be used ; second, on the strength of the forces opposing us.

Consider, for a start, the war on land. If military victory be assumed as our purpose, then we must begin by recognizing that invasion by an army is the only proved means of achieving it. But, for its achievement in any particular case, it is necessary to possess an army strong enough to overcome the defending army. While modern weapons give the aggressor a greater advantage than ever against a small country which lacks such equipment, where two well-equipped modern forces meet the margin of superiority required by the attacking army has continually increased.

The Current of War

The experience of the past generation has shown more clearly that to have a reasonable chance of success on such a front the attacking side needs at least a 3 to 1 superiority—in *weapons*, not merely in numbers of men. For it is aircraft, artillery, tanks, which count to-day.

What chance is there of France and Britain attaining the requisite superiority on land? None in the near future; indeed, it is likely that the margin which the Germans possessed last autumn over their combined forces will be somewhat larger this spring. As for the ultimate outlook, the simple arithmetic of relative man-power suffices to show that the Allies can never hope to attain an appreciable superiority in the quantity of trained troops, while a calculation of Germany's recent rate of equipping new divisions makes it very dubious whether anything like a decisive balance of weapon-power is attainable.

Such chance as there is of "winning" the war on land would seem to rest on the possibility of inventing some essentially new weapon of paralysing effect. Before pinning our hopes to such a possibility, it is well to remember that no wars hitherto have seen the fulfilment of such perennial expectations. The more novel the invention, the more likely it is to be baulked by the limitations of the military users on whom its effect depends.

If the land struggle be recognized as a sphere where no clear decision is probable, we are left to consider the air and the sea.

In the air, it is probable that Germany last autumn had a very considerable superiority in numbers of bombers over the British and French combined, and at least equality in number of fighters. That margin of advantage is being reduced. But even though we may eventually hope to gain a superiority in the air, reasoning from recent experience provides no support for the idea that the air can be decisive of itself. An air offensive can produce widespread damage, and invites it in reply, but is likely to be indecisive unless

Analysis of the War

it is carried out with such an immensely superior force as to paralyse the opponent's air defence. That scale of superiority is hard to foresee, and even if attainable would carry no certainty of victory but only of barbaric devastation. Moreover, if we were to inaugurate a great bombing offensive, and the Germans had in the meantime refrained, we should forfeit our moral position as the defenders of civilization.

As for the sea, the strategic framework of this war is such that the greater part of Germany's frontiers remain open to neutral trade. That framework turns the edge of our best weapon. At the least, the effect of the naval blockade will be slower to develop, with a consequently increased strain on our own capacity to sustain the war. And it may even nullify, altogether, the prospect that economic pressure will eventually compel Germany to surrender.

Victory may be more desirable in the present war than in the past, because of the nature of the Nazi regime. But before staking too heavily upon it, we should be wise to face the question whether there is an adequate chance of achieving it—without self-exhaustion in the effort.

But the prospect becomes different, for the better, if we turn from the dream of victory to view the reality of the checks which we, by our new strength for defence—of ourselves and our neighbours—have put on Germany's scope for further aggression. And if we reflect upon the many-sided irksomeness of the state of "excommunication" in which she has been placed. It was by the freezing weapon of excommunication that in past times the Papacy cooled the blood and curbed the arrogance of power-lusting rulers. Its revival in a modern form, of wider application, may be the best and quickest way of making the Germans realize the gloomy impasse into which they have been brought.

While our action hitherto has largely corresponded to the principle, we are forfeiting much of its effect because we have not unmistakably declared it as our policy. We

The Current of War

confuse the issue by continuing to talk of victory in obsolete terms, and thereby provide Nazi propaganda with starchy and ominous phrases which they can use to stiffen the war-front of their people. Our true aim should be to convince the German people that they have much to gain by a peace of common agreement, respecting the rights of others, and only a prospect of increasing misery by continuing the war. To that end we need to combine a firm defence in the military field, our most *practicable* form of action there, with a penetrating initiative in the psychological and economic fields.

At the same time we ought to give due attention to the problem of easing the strain of war upon the life of our own people. In this "strange kind of war" the nation which comes nearest to maintaining peace-time normality is likely to stay the course best.

It may be significant that the Prime Minister, who is more sober of phrase than most statesmen, avoided altogether in his latest speech the empty word "victory." Instead, in proclaiming our purpose, he emphasized that we would fight on "until the freedom which has been outraged comes into its own again, until friend and enemy can sit down to build a happier and safer world."

After the publication of this article the *Evening Standard* received a letter of strong criticism from Major J. R. Kennedy, formerly Editor of the *Army, Navy and Air Force Gazette*. The Editor asked me to deal with these criticisms in a further article which was published on February 17—accompanied by Major Kennedy's letter which ran as follows :

"Liddell Hart's case rests on the deliberate or unconscious misstatement of a deduction from the lessons of the last war.

"He says 'the attacking side needs at least a three to one superiority.' Then he asks, what chance is there of France and Britain attaining the requisite superiority on land? The impression given is that if the Germans have an army of two million men on the front, the Allies must have at least six

Analysis of the War

million to be able to attack them. As this, for geographical reasons alone, is an impossibility, he is led and also leads his readers to the conclusion that we need to adopt a 'firm defence in the military field,' because we cannot ever hope to be able to attack under favourable conditions.

"As has been pointed out to Liddell Hart, the three to one superiority is not a universal superiority, but a *local* one, that is, one on the front of attack, and the omission of this word changes the whole aspect of the picture. The necessity for local superiority at the point of attack is one of the oldest principles of war, and has often been achieved in the past—as he knows full well—by armies inferior in size.

The adoption of the defensive means the temporary or the permanent abandonment of the initiative. This would enable the enemy to concentrate against any part of our front in the desired superiority of strength. Nothing more crazy as a military plan could be conceived.

It will be remembered that both in Abyssinia and in Spain Liddell Hart predicted the loss of the war if the Italians or Franco were to attack. With these lessons, and that of Poland, it is difficult to believe that—provided he has retained his sanity—he is not being merely mischievous."

.

My article follows ; as here printed a few passages which were cut out—to fit the article within the space available in the paper—are restored.

WHAT ODDS ARE NECESSARY FOR VICTORY ?

To attack effectively requires cool judgment in calculating the chances as well as skilled direction. Moreover, the offensive must be delivered from a secure base—as Napoleon emphasized. That applies not only to war, but to controversy.

Major Kennedy does not seem to have learnt much from his former military studies. No "offensive" could be more easy to meet and refute than that which he launches.

The sentence in my previous article which he challenges actually ran : "The experience of the past generation has shown clearly that to have a reasonable chance of success

The Current of War

the attacking side needs at least a 3 to 1 superiority—in *weapons, not merely in numbers of men.*” For my judgment differs from the official conclusion in considering that what matters is the ratio of superiority in mechanized weapon-power, rather than in mere man-power.

Major Kennedy omits the last part of my sentence, containing the essential qualifying words. Having thus distorted my meaning, he goes on to argue that I give the impression that the Allies would have to deploy six million men if they are to be able to attack a front held by two million Germans. *This he admits is impossible for us to do.*

But his contention is that I have established my case by misstating the verdict of the Official History upon the last war. He asserts that this conclusion merely referred to a *local* superiority at the point of attack, not to a *general* superiority over the enemy's whole forces. He charges me with changing its whole effect by omitting the word “local.” I am very content to meet him on the ground he has chosen.

Here are the exact words in which the conclusion of the Official History, compiled under the auspices of the Committee of Imperial Defence, is set forth :

“Armies even of the highest fighting capacity cannot make up for inadequacy of numbers by the valour of their troops or by the novelty and brilliance of their tactics ; in a conflict between foes of the same standard of skill, determination and valour, *numbers approaching 3 to 1 are required to turn the scale decisively, as they eventually began to do in the autumn of 1918.*”

It is clear, from the reference to the Allied armies attaining such a ratio of strength in the autumn of 1918, that the verdict refers to the general superiority required for victory in a war, not merely to the local superiority required for a battle.

The whole foundation of Major Kennedy's argument thus collapses. It seems a pity that he did not take the elementary

Analysis of the War

precaution of "securing his base" by the slight exertion of looking up his references.

He has shown no less carelessness, "deliberate or unconscious," in quoting my past conclusions. He says that "it will be remembered" how I predicted that the Italians would lose the war in Abyssinia if they were to attack. What I actually predicted was the exact opposite—that the Abyssinians would lose the war if *they* attacked. To quote the headline with which a leading newspaper epitomized an interview I gave a month before the war—"Mass Attacks will mean Annihilation for Abyssinians, Liddell Hart Predicts." Their chief danger, I said, was that they might be "intoxicated by their memory of victory" over the Italians at Adowa in 1896, might "imagine that 1896 could be repeated in the conditions of 1935," and thus "fail to realize that the best hope of successful resistance lies in playing the guerrilla game steadfastly." For some months the Abyssinians resisted the temptation. Then they became impatient, and tried to counter the Italians by reckless mass attacks—with disastrous results. Marshal Badoglio's account of the campaign he conducted is worth studying by those who have any desire to discover the facts.

In regard to Spain, my actual prediction, published early in that war, was that General Franco's "chances of military victory depend on the forces poured in by Italy and Germany—and on these being greatly increased." That reinforcement was forthcoming, as we know. I also emphasized that he could only profit by the offensive in so far as he was able "to concentrate a great superiority of bombers, guns, and tanks against an isolated section of the opposition." Franco proceeded on that method as Italy and Germany provided him with the means. While lacking a superiority in numbers of men, his largest superiority was in numbers of aircraft—about which I had expressed the opinion that this factor "can upset the effectiveness of ground defence against ground attack."

The Current of War

As for Poland, her fate was clearly foreshadowed in my last book, *The Defence of Britain*. No careful reader of that book should have had any delusions as to her chances of withstanding Germany's mechanized forces, or the possibility of France and Britain relieving the pressure on her, unless Russia's support were obtained.

The fulfilment of these predictions was not proof of any special gift of foresight, but simply of the value of applying the scientific method in studying the evidence. This demands that one's conclusions should emerge from an impartial analysis of the facts, instead of being dictated by one's wishes. From the reckless way in which Major Kennedy garbles his facts it is clear that he finds it easier to follow the method of Dr. Goebbels.

Coming back to the main question, whether we can reasonably expect to achieve military victory in the present war, Major Kennedy has simplified the issue by implying that the answer depends on whether or not I misinterpreted the official verdict. As we have seen, the exact words in which that verdict is expressed leave no doubt as to its meaning—that a superiority "approaching three to one" in total numbers is necessary to justify hopes of victory.

Any comparison of relative man-power shows that Britain and France, even if they strained their resources to the uttermost, could not hope to attain much more than equality in numbers—a very different matter from the required 3 to 1 total superiority. Moreover, if they push Germany and Russia closer into each other's arms there would be a real prospect of creating a 3 to 1 superiority the other way round. Here are the facts with which we have to reckon—not as we would wish to see them.

On the basis of calculation provided by the Official History, there is no ground for talking of victory. There would at least be more hope in my calculation—that the required superiority is a matter of weapon-power rather than of numbers. As my previous article suggested, the

Analysis of the War

invention of some radically new weapon might turn the scale. Likewise, the attainment of such an overwhelming air superiority as to drive the enemy's air force out of the sky and paralyse his land forces. But these are no better than remote *possibilities*. Statesmen are wise to reckon with *probabilities* in steering a course on which depends their people's fate.

If anybody has to drive along a mountain road, skirting precipices, he takes care to choose a sober driver. Why, then, should a nation be expected to put unquestioning trust in drivers so emotionally drunk that they see not merely double but treble? For such is the apparent state of those who, in the actual circumstances of to-day, talk of going out for decisive victory. If their actions fulfil their words, what they would really be doing is to take the shortest cut to disaster—which could be avoided with more careful driving.

The recent assertion of some Ministers that we "have got to go on either to victory or defeat" merely shows their astonishing ignorance of the history of war. Hardly any of the many wars which have plagued Europe since the Middle Ages have ended decisively. Indeed, Bismarck was almost the only Continental statesman who has shown the capacity to wage a profitable war—because he took great care to keep it limited and to take such a practicable aim as to ensure that it would be quickly over. All the Powers which have gone all-out regardless of the cost have ended by producing the downfall of their own power.

This is the thirteenth war with a Continental Power in which we have become engaged since we had to face the threat of the Spanish "Armada." Only two of these have ended with a clear-cut victory. The first of these was the war against Napoleonic France, the second was the last war. In each of these we had a majority of the Great Powers allied with us against the enemy—an advantage lacking to-day. Even so, those are the two wars which have left

The Current of War

us most exhausted. By contrast, we gained considerable benefit from most of the wars which ended with an agreed peace. No country has been more successful in achieving permanent advantages, for its security and future prosperity, from indecisive wars.

This is a lesson which we might well pass on to our French allies, who have suffered so much in the past for pursuing dreams of victory to the sacrifice of its real purpose.

In the light of these centuries of experience, there is a grave responsibility on our present statesmen to show that there are adequate grounds for committing the nation to an unlimited war-aim—of “victory or defeat.” To attempt more than is possible is the surest way, not to victory, but to defeat. For it is the natural cause of collapse from overstrain, if not from exposure.

Obviously, it is desirable to keep the initiative—but you are more likely to lose it than keep it if you bang your head against a wall. And it is equally paralysing to get your fingers wedged in stretching out to find a remote crevice round the corners of the wall. We ought to have learnt from the experience of the last war the folly of pushing in forces that are not strong enough to push on—and remain locked up in what the enemy then caustically described as their “largest internment camps.”

It is quite a different matter, and a much wiser policy, to forestall the enemy by buttressing the defence of points he might attack. Here, as well as in the economic and psychological fields, there is real scope for calculated initiative.

But it is stupid to put up a bluff that the enemy can see through. He will merely be convinced that we are “shouting to keep up courage,” and be proportionately encouraged at such evidence of our unbalanced state of mind.

He is more likely to be impressed if we make it plain that we are not going to play into his hands, but are going to leave it to him to bang his head against our walls, if he is

Analysis of the War

foolish enough. And that, in the meantime, we are going to make the continuance of the war as uncomfortable for him as possible—in the various ways that are practicable—until he is ready to discuss peace on a just basis.

The grounds for adopting such a practical policy, instead of pursuing wishful dreams, are plain. They require no expert knowledge, but simply common honesty in presenting, and facing, the basic facts.

It will be noted that in this article I suggested that by the spring the German margin of superiority over the combined French and British Armies would prove to be greater than it had been in the autumn. That suggestion was no more than a surmise, if based on reasoning. Some weeks later I learnt that there was definite ground for estimating that the German forces would have increased from little more than 100 divisions at the start of the war to a total of 160, or perhaps 180 divisions. Even this proved to be an under-estimate.

The facts as now known bear striking testimony to the strides which the Germans had made compared with the slight progress of the Allies. When the Germans launched their offensive in May, they are reported to have had over 200 divisions, of which they were able to concentrate 120 or more on the Western Front. The Allied strength in France then amounted to 90 French divisions and 10 British divisions—but of the French divisions approximately a third were unfit in training and equipment for active operations.

This superiority of force on the enemy's side was immensely greater in the weapons that mattered most. The Germans are estimated to have had a total of 7500 tanks against 2000—almost a 4 to 1 advantage. But even this figure did not truly represent the odds against the Allies. For the larger proportion of the French, in contrast to the German, were slow-moving infantry tanks. For mechanized manoeuvre the Germans had over 10 armoured divisions comprising approximately 500 tanks apiece. The French, apart from 3 light mechanized divisions, were just in process of creating 3 armoured divisions—which had only 150 tanks apiece.

In the air, the German superiority was even greater. It was estimated that they possessed some 2500 bombers (French estimates put the figure higher, at 3500), and some 1500

The Current of War

fighters in their first-line squadrons. The French had only 420 fighters, while most of their bombers were so slow that less than 40 could be counted on for operations in day-time.

Hardly less serious was the French shortage of anti-tank guns and anti-aircraft guns.

During the crucial winter it would seem that the French leaders were concentrating their efforts, and thoughts, on building heavy guns and amassing shells for an ultimate offensive against the Siegfried Line—to the neglect of the lighter instruments needed to counter a German manoeuvre round the Maginot Line.

CHAPTER XV

WILL THE CITIES BE BOMBED?

This was the first of a series of four articles which the Editor of the *Sunday Express*, Mr. John Gordon, asked me to write. It was published on February 11, 1940.

IN September (1939), when war was declared, the vast majority of the public expected that it would open with a bombing offensive directed against our cities and ports. That expectation was falsified by events. Now, six months later, with the spring of a fresh year of war approaching, few seem to reckon with the possibility that the postponement was but temporary. Indeed, the Government appear in this respect to represent a small minority of opinion—when their continued removal of civil servants from London, and widening distribution of the country's administrative machinery, is contrasted with the largely unanimous way in which the public have not merely ignored their lead but disrupted their evacuation scheme. September's orderly exodus from the cities has been succeeded by a spontaneous and spreading reflux of the population, which has re-established most of them, together with their children, back in their homes.

If the causes of this magnetic homeward pull are quite understandable psychologically, it is difficult to find a rational justification in the circumstances of the war now compared with its opening phase. In the first place there is no obvious, isolated, and easily-accessible prime objective—such as Poland offered—to provide an inviting target for the

The Current of War

concentration of the German Air Force. Secondly, Germany's hope that a quickly overwhelming victory there would result in a successful limited war, instead of a protracted general war, has disappeared. Thirdly, as the stalemate in the West has become plainer, there is the natural growth of an emotional urge, on both sides, to find some way of "doing something"—without much regard to whether action will be justified by its results.

Rational calculation is always strongest in the opening phase of a war. It tends to be undermined, or even swept away, by the surge of instinctive pugnacity as the war develops. When the blood becomes heated, it goes to the head, so that cool thinking no longer prevails. And even where a condition of stalemate checks the rush of blood to the head, the growth of boredom may be almost as potent in producing unreasoned action.

In *The Defence of Britain*, part of which was serialized in the *Sunday Express* two months before the war, I ventured to predict that a recognition of the unlikelihood of decisive results and a mutual fear of air reprisals might lead the Great Powers to "a tacit limitation of war" as between themselves, if they became engaged. "Only against states which lack the means to resist on land or retaliate in the air" were they likely to go all out. The events of September fulfilled this view. And the ensuing months have continued to confirm it.

But I should be chary of prophesying that a forecast which fitted the initial phase of war will still do so in a later stage. While reasoned calculation based on recent experience tends to reinforce the case for mutual restraint, the pressure of the expanding gases of belligerent feeling may burst it, at any moment. In such a state it may only take a spark to produce a devastating explosion—and sparks are being scattered in numerous public speeches.

In this country a dawning realization of the improbability of any decisive issue on land, owing to the strength of

Will the Cities be Bombed ?

modern defence, has led increasingly to a cry for trying the effect of an air offensive. If that can develop such force here, among a people where anger is slow to generate, how much more easily might it oust reason in the ruling circles of a nation under Nazi leadership ?

While the Germans have had more painful cause to learn the unwisdom of indulging in violence that falls short of proving decisive, experience has shown that they are addicted to acting on short views. And the impetuosity of the Nazi leaders may prove too strong for the calculating caution with which the Great General Staff may be credited since the last war.

On our side there is more reason, superficially at least, for advocating an air offensive. In contrast to Germany, who fulfilled her immediate war aim with the conquest of Poland, Britain and France inevitably bear the appearance of failure so long as Poland lies under the enemy's heel. That is the unfortunate result of the Polish guarantee, which tempted Hitler with the prospect of a cheap victory in the East while forfeiting the inherent advantage—in power of self-defence—which we possessed for meeting any attempted German aggression in the West. When Hitler struck at a rashly guaranteed Poland we were caught on the wrong foot—strategically.

Hence arises the primary impulse for some kind of action on our part. It has increased with the growth of doubt as to the effect of economic pressure towards bringing about Germany's capitulation within a reasonable time. That urge has been expressed in its most reasonable form, comparatively, by Mr. Amery when advocating an air war of wastage :

“ Continual raiding of Germany would provoke retaliatory measures against this country which would use up still more material as well as strengthen the determination of our people. Raids on Germany would shake the confidence of the people of Germany in Hitler and would disorganize their national

The Current of War

life and be worth many victories in the field. A blockade alone would never bring about Germany's defeat and it would be an illusion to think that we can starve Germany into surrender. But she had not nearly enough raw materials for the terrific demands of a modern mechanized war."

The soundness of such reasoning on practical grounds—it departs obviously from moral grounds—depends on whether the actual conditions of the war make it practicable to attempt, *and* likely to achieve its purpose.

The first of these conditions is the relative strength of the opposing air forces. Here, any scientific investigation of the facts is hindered by the fog of war. But expert estimates in well-informed neutral countries put the number of German bombers last autumn at rather more than double that of the British and French combined, and the number of German fighters as about equal to their total. Whatever our recent rate of expansion, it is foolish to imagine that any such balance can be quickly reversed. Such flights of fancy seem to "take off" with the complacent assumption that the enemy is standing still, to await our convenience. And they skim over the limiting factors on the rate of expansion of an air *force*—as distinct from mere output of machines.

Here it is worth emphasizing some fundamental considerations which bear on the question of preparation for the offensive in the air. A bomber requires a larger crew than a fighter. Its crew takes longer to train. The machines are much more costly to build. And when it comes to battle, any bomber that is hit is likely to be a total loss together with its highly trained crew, whereas the defending fighter may be able to make a safe landing in its own territory, while its pilot, thanks to his parachute, has an even better chance of "living to fight another day." Thus the side which takes the offensive in the air needs not merely a superiority, but a vast superiority, in order to maintain the pace.

Will the Cities be Bombed ?

As our expansion proceeds we may hope to overtake the German lead in quantity while maintaining the lead in quality which, so far as our fighters were concerned, proved so valuable last autumn. But if and when we achieved a scale of offensive strength double that of the Germans, it is well to realize that we should only have reached the vantage point where the Germans stood earlier in the war—and, surveying the prospect, presumably judged that it was not good enough to make an offensive worth attempting. It would certainly be a lapse from our past record if we failed to maintain a self-control and cool-headed reasoning at least equal to that which the Germans have shown.

Another condition to be weighed is that of relative strategic geography. The Ruhr offers us a vulnerable target within closer reach, from air bases in France, than any of our industrial areas are from the German air bases. On the other hand, this country as a whole presents more closely packed, and at the same time more accessible, targets than Germany. It has to be recognized that, for air defence, the enemy enjoys the strategic advantage of having only a third of the frontage to cover. Germany's land frontier in the West, added to her North Sea coast-line, makes a total extent of only 300 miles compared with the 900 miles of the British coast-line and the French land frontier together. The disadvantage is still greater in the overseas approach—British raids on Germany would have to pass through a gap of only 120 miles, between Denmark and Holland, and would thus have to meet an easily concentrated defence, whereas German raids have a choice of approach anywhere along the 700-mile stretch between the English Channel and the Shetland Isles.

Again, London and many other important targets here lie closer to the coast than corresponding targets in Germany. One consequence of this fact is that our bombers need to have a longer range than the Germans. For while the open sea may be crossed at cruising speed, the risk of meeting

The Current of War

hostile fighters and guns naturally multiplies as land is reached, and thus making it necessary to fly at full throttle—which trebles the petrol consumption and proportionately reduces the available radius of action.

A further question which has to be weighed is the practical effect of an air offensive, even if made in superior force. Recent experience affords little support for the belief that it would be decisive against another great Power—save perhaps in hardening the enemy people's determination to resist. Where there is any considerable air defence, the accuracy of bombing is liable to be so disturbed that the chances of a vital hit on a military objective are comparatively slight. But the wider the miss, the more likely that some luckless civilians will be hit instead. The bombing of military objectives in the interior of a country cannot in practice, as distinct from theory, be restricted to its proper objectives.

The factor of inaccuracy thus has a close bearing on the question of inhumanity. We could not take the initiative in trying the effect of an air offensive without forfeiting our present moral position as upholders of civilization. Beyond that, it would involve us in a breaking of our word which would support our enemies' charge that, like others, we were only ready to keep our promises so far as they suited our convenience.

Any careful analysis of these practical conditions and moral considerations provides ample ground for the Government's policy of restraint in the air war. The unemployed field-m Marshals and retired generals who urge a policy of "pitiless blows," while denouncing "amateur strategists," make it plain that they are incapable of calculating correctly the simplest sum in strategic arithmetic. They cannot even see that their very clamour for such methods aids the enemy to weaken our moral position in the eyes of the neutrals.

As for the question whether the Germans will launch a bombing offensive, there are obvious reasons why they

Will the Cities be Bombed?

should hesitate to try now a course which they abstained from attempting when their superiority was greater. On the other hand, it would be wise to allow for the possibility that they may be tempted to venture by a fond belief in the superior powers of some new technical means. Or they, too, may find that the instinctive urge to action is too strong for the strategist's reasoned calculation of the chances.

In most wars, rash action leading to defeat has commonly been precipitated by hot-heads—pugnacity is the very contradiction of strategy. In this war, the existence of great bombing forces is an invitation to folly, increasing with strategic frustration. They are so easily loosed, so uncontrollable in detail, compared with sea and land forces. An impulsive youth in a bomber has the power to produce an explosion that may shake a continent. While it is remarkable what self-restraint has hitherto been shown under strong temptation by the men of the air forces, we may wonder whether it will last indefinitely.

Here lies the greatest common menace to-day. As a threat to European civilization it probably exceeds the value of the bombing forces as a means of achieving the national object in war.

CHAPTER XVI

IS IT STALEMATE IN THE WEST ?

This was the second of the *Sunday Express* series. It was written under the same handicap mentioned in my introductory note to Chapter II. Because of the newly arisen danger that we might be drawn into a diversion of our sparse forces to Scandinavia, it had become even more essential not to draw attention to our narrow margin of strength to meet a German attack in the West.

WILL the coming of spring bring a great offensive on the Western Front ? Or will the unrestful calm that has prevailed there since the start of the war, barely ruffled by the French exploratory operations in September, continue to reign over the unfought battle-fields where some millions of men are standing by, ready for action ? In other words, will the stalemate be authoritatively recognized by the belligerent parties ?

While it would be unwise to discount the power of the emotional forces that are seeking a violent outlet, reasoned calculation of the odds against success may well prevail over this instinctive urge. There is significance in the manifest way that either party is wishing that the other would attack, and making the most of any sign of such precipitation.

It is natural that those who are soldiers by vocation should chafe at the prolonged inaction. Never has a war of any similar magnitude begun and continued in such a state of general paralysis of the main armies. The situation during the first half-year has increasingly deepened the point of a jesting comment made in September, when one

Is It Stalemate in the West ?

of the newspapers was inviting suggestions as to a suitable new marching song for the Army : that the most appropriate would be a revival of an old tune—" All dressed up and nowhere to go."

The natural reluctance of ardent soldiers to recognize the creeping paralysis of war was exemplified by the criticism which was applied by them to one of the main conclusions in my last book, *The Defence of Britain*, published just before the war—that point being the improbability of any successful offensive by either side on the Western Front if war should come. It was an offence to their offensive spirit. One of the leading military journals, representative of the orthodox school, denounced it in an article entitled " False Doctrine." This ended with a confident assertion that the Allied staffs did not accept such a view, and that the Allied forces were not likely to " take the field " without seeking to deliver " a knock-out blow."

Being a quarterly journal, however, the assurance did not appear until the Allied staffs, and the Allied forces, had for a month past confirmed my prediction ! Five months more have since passed—and I should be willing to give the prediction a further extension.

It is to the credit of serving soldiers in high quarters that, whatever their theoretical inclinations, they have been more ready than their predecessors of 1914-1918 to recognize *concrete* facts. And to refrain from asking of their troops a vain sacrifice in attempting the impossible. How great a tribute that has been to their common sense can be realized by a knowledge of history. For the past has many times shown that there is nothing more fatal, to an army or a nation, than the instinct to attempt what cannot succeed from the feeling that if it could succeed it would be good.

This comparatively new professional realism, when brought face to face with facts, is all the more creditable by contrast with the picture of a future war which dominated our

The Current of War

army's training before the war came. It was in vain that for a number of years one had pointed out that defence was the probable rôle of our army at the outset of another war, and that consequently it would be advisable to give our troops more training in preparation for defence. The "attack" continued to be the basic object of the vast majority of exercises—although there was little sign of the provision of the modern equipment required to give it even a chance of success. As recently as the autumn of 1937 the then Chief of the Imperial General Staff laid down that "Our Army must be trained for the offensive"—since in his view the attack, adequately prepared, would "always get the better of defence." It was not until 1938 that a small modification was made by the General Staff whereby "the counter-offensive" was added to "the offensive" in defining the main subject for study in the training of the Army! But the problem of defence, the obvious problem, continued to be kept in the background.

Another regular feature in almost every exercise was the approach march with an advanced guard moving ahead to discover and locate the enemy. After the Army Manœuvres of 1937 I suggested, not for the first time, that "the old picture of a war opening with an advance across a wide strategic no-man's-land is out of date"—that contact would be established, and the battle-front crystallized, in the first hours of war, long before any British Expeditionary Force could arrive. But the obsolete ritual continued to be practised—with infinite waste of time. From a scientific viewpoint it was remarkable evidence of the power of custom to defy realism. Thus such training predominated until last September—when the British forces arrived in France to occupy their allotted position on a fortified frontier which left no room for "advanced guards."

Fortunately, soldiers who have had practical experience in command of men are apt to develop a rugged common sense which shakes off the dead hand of time-honoured

Is It Stalemate in the West?

military custom. In England, Sir Edmund Ironside has long been an example of nonconformity with such ritual. In France, General Gamelin has a natural logic of mind which has tended to work in a similar way. And when it came to embarking on offensive plans, both of them were able to suppress their professional predilections when they came down to examine the hard facts of the problem. The urge for reckless action, for action's sake, would seem to come rather from impatient civilians or retired generals who are out of touch with the facts of the situation.

Shortly before the war it was reckoned that the French should be able to mobilize up to seventy divisions in addition to the fortress troops in the Maginot Line. As for the Germans, it was estimated that they might be able to place in the field something over a hundred divisions. The Poles had an army of thirty-two divisions, and in theory should have been able to double it on mobilization, but there was serious doubt whether they had the equipment to do so.

From this it might seem that the opposing forces were so evenly balanced as to check the temptation to aggression. If any hopes were built on such a purely numerical reckoning, they ignored strategic factors which must obviously turn the balance. While the French in the west were faced with the Siegfried Line, the Germans were offered in the east a most inviting target—the immensely long and strategically encircled Polish frontier, unfortified, and defended by an army which was not only ill-equipped but did not really believe in the defensive. For the Poles showed a fundamental unrealism in the way they consoled themselves for a lack of modern weapons by a gallant disdain for such material means. On that front the Germans had every prospect of being able to enjoy an overwhelming superiority in aircraft, tanks, and guns.

The sum of evidence from neutral sources suggests that when the war came the French considerably exceeded the estimate of their mobilizable strength, although at the price

The Current of War

of dislocating their industrial life ; but that the Poles did not attain more than half their theoretical expansion. It would seem from reports that the Germans were able to concentrate about seventy divisions and the bulk of their mechanized equipment to pulverize the Poles, and that they considered some twenty divisions were sufficient to hold off the French in the west. If that be correct, it is not surprising : for the deep defence system of the Siegfried Line might reasonably be counted on to increase, beyond a 3 to 1 ratio, the scale of force which the French would require in order to attack effectively.

With the arrival in the west of the bulk of the German Army, released by the swift ending of the Polish campaign, the large, if not large enough, temporary superiority of the French disappeared—the balance turning to the German's advantage.

Moreover, according to neutral reports, the Germans have created a very considerable number of new divisions, and some estimates suggest that the total may be found to have increased about 50 per cent. If so, their strength relatively to the Allies may be larger this spring than it was last autumn, after the close of the Polish campaign.

Even if these estimates should prove excessive, it is obvious that General Gamelin can hardly be expected to achieve now, by an offensive, what he judged that it was unwise to attempt when the Polish Army was in being and the forces defending the Siegfried Line—itsself now made deeper—were far smaller. No military information is needed to arrive at such a conclusion, but only a sense of proportion.

For the Germans the prospect for an offensive might seem more promising. But, by any modern process of calculation, their margin of superiority in numbers is not enough to support that promise. So far as can be gauged, only the introduction of some radically new weapon, or extraordinarily bad generalship on the Allies' side, could give them any chance of real success. Otherwise they would be

Is It Stalemate in the West?

inviting a heavy repulse—which might have far-reaching repercussions.

Their strategic situation provides no cause for indulging in such a perilous gamble. They have fulfilled their immediate purpose with the conquest of Poland ; to assure the security of their recent gains they have merely to defend a highly defensible frontier in the west only 200 miles wide. Their economic situation at present scarcely seems to prompt such a venture ; and by holding their hand they may hope to strengthen it through an increasing flow of Russian supplies. While we must allow for the possibility of an emotional urge overriding all reasoned calculations, the sum effect of these is so clear as to form an exceptionally strong check on emotional urges. Especially as there are such obvious outlets south-eastward or north-westward where military pressure has a much better prospect of achieving, cheaply, both emotional gratification and further solid assets.

There remains the question whether the Germans will try a limited coup on the flanks of the main Western front, for the advancement of their strategic position. Neither Belgium nor Switzerland offers a very tempting target. The water-lines in the one case, the mountain ranges in the other, form a formidable obstacle to rapid penetration, while Allied reinforcement to either if attacked would be comparatively easy. An incomplete success might bring more complications than advantages to the invader.

Holland is a more accessible and more vulnerable target, besides being more difficult of reinforcement by the Allies. And if Germany should be counting on decisive results from an air offensive against England, the establishment of her air bases in Holland would be an important step forward. On the other hand, if such an air offensive failed to succeed, and succeed soon, she would have incurred the strategic disadvantage of greatly widening the path and increasing the scope for the Allied air forces : which would become an

The Current of War

increasing boomerang with every stage of the latter's growth. She would also, immediately, simplify our naval blockade. Thus, apart from the political drawbacks, if Hitler can afford to take a long view, he may very well continue to stop short of invading Holland.

As for the ultimate outlook for achieving a decision in the war, no clearer or weightier forecast can be found than the conclusion drawn from the last war by the Official History, which is compiled under the auspices of the Committee of Imperial Defence [quoted on page 188].

Unless that conclusion be totally unsound, no stretch of the imagination can find on either side now the potential means of victory in a total war. By no calculation, save in a state of intoxication, can two and two make twelve.

It would be wise if all the warring peoples, and their leaders, pondered that conclusion before again putting it to the test of unlimited slaughter with immeasurable consequences.

If it may seem a hard conclusion to swallow, it is worth reflecting on the other great difference, this time for the better, between the situation to-day and that of a generation ago. Then, the early loss of a large part of France and Belgium compelled us to go on battling, in offensive after offensive, until eventually with America's entry the required total superiority was attained. Now, the frontiers of the West are inviolate¹—owing to the increased power of modern defence. That same power may enable the extension of similar security, against aggression, to other frontiers.

When I suggested in this article that the German chance of success in an offensive was likely to depend on "the introduction of some radically new weapon, or extraordinarily bad generalship on the Allies' side," I had some reason for an underlying uneasiness on both grounds. But my doubts of

¹ The word "inviolable" was explicitly used—meaning that the frontiers of the West were intact at that time, after six months of war—in distinction to "inviolable."

Is It Stalemate in the West?

the generalship were chiefly in regard to its grasp of mechanized warfare and quickness in counter-manceuvre. I hardly imagined that the French Command, after the bitter lesson of 1914, would commit such an extraordinary blunder as that which was to be made in May.

Political considerations may have dictated the decision by which the Franco-British forces, instead of standing firmly posted to meet the German offensive, moved out of their defences and seventy miles forward into Belgium—to the ill-prepared line of the Dyle. But the actual dispositions cannot be thus explained. The fact that the whole of the Allied left wing was pushed forward into Western Belgium, while the hinge of the advance, facing Belgian Luxembourg, was left almost unguarded, would seem to have been due to a blind application of the orthodox principle of concentration, combined with the conventional idea that the enemy's mechanized forces could not operate in the wooded and hilly country of the Ardennes. The result was that nearly 40 divisions—including the Belgian—were assembled to give battle on the 60-mile front between Antwerp and Namur—i.e. a potential density of 1 division to every $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles of frontage. By contrast, only a few divisions of inferior grade, meagrely equipped with anti-tank weapons, were left to cover the easterly half of the Franco-Belgian frontier—one of them was stretched over more than twenty miles of front.

By advancing into the open, in face of an enemy known to be much superior in strength, General Gamelin took a big risk. By pushing the best-trained and best-equipped part of his forces so far to the east, he invited a stroke against their rear flank, and the danger of them being cut off. By neglecting to provide adequate cover for the hinge of that exposed advance, he contracted a fatal risk.

Such a hazardous plan was not in accord with his temperament or with his general theory. How is it to be explained? According to some well-informed French observers, General Gamelin's rashness was prompted by M. Reynaud's criticism of his caution. For some time, M. Reynaud had sought to persuade the Cabinet to agree to his dismissal. Such an atmosphere was not favourable to the well-calculated conduct of a defensive battle against heavy odds—even if it does not excuse the earlier failure to make adequate preparations for defence along the sector facing the Ardennes.

The Current of War

M. Reynaud had a rare sense of initiative. He had grasped the importance of mechanized forces earlier than any other French statesman—or most French soldiers. He was well acquainted with the principles of strategy, if he did not understand their application: and, still less, the meaning of grand strategy. It was his tragedy that when he came to power, belatedly, he tried to pursue the right course at the wrong time—when conditions made it the wrong course. Thereby he precipitated the tragedy of France.

Until, if ever, the German archives are accessible to future historians, we cannot know whether or not Hitler's decision to take the offensive in the West was prompted by the Allies' attitude. But it is obvious that the increasingly offensive line followed by the "activists" in the Allied governments and countries was the most certain way to provoke consequences which they were unready to meet. That attitude was shown in the talk about bombing Germany; about the duty of the neutrals to make common cause with France and Britain; about intervention in Scandinavia; and about pressure on Belgium to allow the entry of Allied forces. In France, this impulse was accentuated when M. Reynaud became Prime Minister; his desire to coerce the Belgians into taking sides brought him into conflict with Gamelin, who feared that the result would be to push Belgium and her forces into Germany's arms. The suggestions about opening up the war became more and more blatant. If history should reveal that this miscalculated initiative was the means of provoking Hitler's offensive—as some of its advocates were foolish enough to desire—what a tragedy for humanity! It is always folly to stir up a hornets' nest before you are adequately equipped to deal with it effectively.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WAR

This was intended to be the third of my series for the *Sunday Express*. However, owing to the more immediate claims of the Finnish situation it was deferred until after an article of mine on that subject. It actually appeared on March 3.

HOW are the British people standing the psychological strain of the war? How are the German people standing it? Is there a difference to be found here such as would provide "assurance of victory"? If so, what is the most effective way of developing it? If not, can we find an alternative course that offers any good solution of the war-problem?

The attitude of the British people last September was very different from that of August, 1914, showing a spirit of resigned determination that had scarcely a tinge of enthusiasm. Yet the definite outbreak of war was in a sense welcomed by many—as a relief from the strain of the "war of nerves" which had preceded it. That welcoming attitude may have been short-sighted, like the proverbial leap "out of the frying-pan into the fire," but it was a very natural reaction. Men and women had come to feel that they could not get on with the ordinary business of life while crisis followed crisis at short intervals. It was too much like living on the slopes of a volcano.

When the war came that tension of uncertainty was removed. People found it easier to brace themselves to meet a definite danger. The common feeling was expressed in such remarks as "let's get it over"—an instinctive hope

The Current of War

which does not take account of the historical fact that countries rarely get over a war in the way they pictured when they got into it.

When the expected danger did not materialize, and the war took a form that only a few had foreseen, the onset of boredom was delayed by the state of perplexity. This in turn was sustained by the prevalent ignorance as to the underlying conditions which had almost inevitably produced such "a strange war." Repeated speculation as to when and where the war would begin in earnest helped to stave off any sudden psychological slump.

Meanwhile, it was found by many that the war had brought its own compensations for the changes and discomforts it caused. As a war it might seem unexciting, yet by comparison with the tediousness or triviality of their normal existence it gave them a fresh interest in life. In the majority of people the yearning for excitement is always in conflict with their desire for security—and here the sense of security had been lost before the war actually came. Moreover, its numerous compensations have not yet been offset by any widespread suffering. In happy contrast the outlet for beneficial emotions has been more widespread than ever before, largely owing to the plentiful opportunities for national service with which "A.R.P." in its various forms has provided women as well as men over military age. There is nothing to equal being busy, especially on work that is felt to be of real value, as a means of easing the strain of war.

Such occupation is also effective in leaving little room for thought about the wider aspects of the war, and in shutting out doubts as to the ultimate prospects. Concentration fosters determination, while foreshortening the horizon. And such a tendency is all the stronger because of the oft-remarked "bulldog strain" in the British character.

The sum of these factors accounts for the comparatively

The Psychological War

unquestioning mood which persists here after six months of a war that is surrounded by so many obvious question-marks. Enthusiasm may be rare, but the majority of the people, in a spirit of mingled resignation and resolution, are as ready to go on with the war as they were to enter it, content to rely on the "assurance of victory" given by their leaders without wondering how it may be achieved.

When we turn to the German side, the general verdict of discerning neutral observers suggests that in the mood prevailing among the German people the similarities are, on the whole, greater than the differences. If there is more discontent among the working classes than here, there is on the other hand more positive enthusiasm among the Nazi-trained youth of the nation. If there is in general more grumbling than here, it is offset by a stronger habit of obedience. If they have to bear more discomforts and deprivations than the British people, they are more accustomed to bearing them—and, in comparison, have suffered less by the change from peace to war. If there is, none the less, a greater longing for peace among the majority of the population, they do not see how it can come except through their victory. For, beyond the tightness of the Nazi grip upon their necks, they see the war, in its superficial form, as an attack by jealous rivals upon a peace-desiring Germany. To them the Polish campaign does not appear as an integral part of this war, but as a separate affair, not really our concern, which furnished us with the excuse for launching an attack upon them. And that impression is deepened by every utterance in Britain and France which breathes a bellicose spirit or suggests that the Allies are aiming to impose another and more drastic peace of Versailles. German home propaganda naturally makes the most of these frequently offered opportunities.

From this comes a fatalistic determination to go on with the war—lest worse befall them. And it is accompanied by an uncritical faith in Hitler's "assurance of victory"—a

The Current of War

faith which, if it springs from the wish to believe, has a base in his fulfilment of such assurances hitherto. It lies with Dr. Goebbels to keep it nourished with an unfailing supply of good news—which is the easiest to meet of all human needs.

Thus, whatever the differences between the attitudes in which the British and German peoples are facing the war, there is an obvious similarity between its effects on either side. In the psychological sphere, as in the military sphere, the present situation is one of deadlock.

Is there a way of dissolving that deadlock? That is the most pressing problem of the war. For on its solution depends the prospect of achieving the purpose which brought us into the war, and the chance of avoiding common exhaustion.

When a sober calculation is made of the strength of the opposing forces, and of the way that the fortification of their respective frontiers has multiplied the normal advantage of defence in modern war, there is good reason to conclude that the issue of this war is more likely to depend on a psychological than on a military initiative.¹

Napoleon said that in war "the moral is to the physical as three to one." He also said that victory lies with the "big battalions." How are we to explain such an apparent contradiction between the suggestion that the psychological factors can discount superior strength, and the implication that it is really numbers that count?

He himself did not trouble to reconcile the contradiction, one of many in his disquisitions on war. Like most of his kind, he was a muddled thinker. More than most of them, he was inclined, after winning his battles largely by opportunism, to concoct an elaborate explanation of how he had won by following, and improving on, the methods of the old masters.

¹ I was here, as should be clear from the context, dealing with the problem from our point of view.

The Psychological War

There is truth, however, in each of his statements. Battles have frequently been won by the numerically weaker side : sometimes through the skill of the commander in playing on his opponent's nerves ; sometimes through the folly of a commander in shattering his troops against a strong position or leading them into a trap ; sometimes because the nominally weaker side possessed a superior weapon or tactical technique which nullified the weight of numbers ; sometimes because one side is definitely weaker in morale. National pride, everywhere, would encourage the idea that the last type would be the most common, but in historical reality it has been the least frequent. Subject to this qualification, a good case can be made for the view that quality counts for more than quantity on the battlefield.

There is, however, a great difference between winning battles and winning wars. In the latter, experience tends to confirm the value of the "big battalions"¹—in any war where both sides are aiming at a decisive result.

Of all the wars in Europe in which we have become engaged during nearly a thousand years, only two have ended in a definite victory. These two were the war against Napoleon and the last war with Germany. In each of them we were able to collect allies with whom we finally achieved an overwhelming superiority of numbers over an exhausted foe—even so, none of our wars has left us so exhausted. I recently read an article by a celebrated general which argued that the way to win this war was to get one or more of Nazi Germany's neighbours to join us in "a war of liberation, such as that against Napoleon from 1812 to 1814." He did not seem aware that the five strongest powers in Europe were then arrayed on our side, whereas the only fresh European allies that can be found to-day are small states, hardly capable of defending themselves. As for the last war, we had a majority of the Great Powers

¹ i.e. the sum of the national resources—in a modern war.

The Current of War

on our side in the first year, unlike to-day, and only gained the upper hand in the fourth year after America's weight was thrown into the balance. Examination of that experience led our Official History to the conclusion that in a war between foes of similar calibre "numbers approaching 3 to 1 are required to turn the scale decisively."

Such a weighty judgment, delivered in sober reflection, and sponsored by the highest military body in the land, cannot be lightly discounted under the intoxication of the instinctive wish for victory in this new war.

The responsibility now lies on those who decide policy to justify their grounds for disregarding this conclusion—for such disregard is implied in their repeated declarations that our war-aim is a decisive victory.

It is easy to see, without an expert eye, that there is no prospect of the required superiority of force on the horizon of this war—and more than a risk of doubling Germany's strength by driving Russia into her arms. In such a situation, the Government's "assurance of victory" inevitably recalls Hans Andersen's fairy-tale entitled "The Emperor's New Clothes"—which describes how certain impostors, who knew human weaknesses, pretended to weave the Emperor a new suit which, they alleged, had the wonderful property of remaining invisible to everyone who was unfit for the office he held. When the Emperor's ministers were sent to inspect it they were led, out of natural regard for their own repute, to extol the colour and design of a dress that was invisible to them. The Emperor, too, when he came to see it, was reluctant to admit the apparent evidence of his own unfitness. And when he set out in procession with his courtiers, the people preferred to trust his assurance rather than their own eyes—until a little child, with clear-eyed innocence, cried out: "But the Emperor has nothing at all on."

There would seem to be need of another clear-eyed "child," innocent of the art of flattery, to call attention to

The Psychological War

the obvious before this war's procession has gone much further.

The absence of the odds needed for victory in the field is also, unfortunately, an obstacle to the chances of a moral collapse in Germany or of a revolt against the Nazi regime. There seems to be general agreement among neutral observers that neither of these possibilities can be anticipated unless and until the German forces have suffered a reverse too plain for their propaganda and censorship to conceal. And this view is supported by the general experience that successful uprisings against an authoritarian regime have usually been the sequel to, rather than the cause of, military failure.

On the other hand, a frank recognition of the improbability of victory would be of real advantage in simplifying the problem of how we can best take the initiative in the psychological sphere. It would enable us to drop the threat of attack which naturally rallies the German people behind Hitler, and to concentrate on showing them that the continuance of a state of war, with all its discomforts and misery, is due to the state of tension and apprehension which their leaders have produced by disregarding other people's rights.

If the German people are haunted by the fear of another and worse Versailles, as many reports imply, there is nothing more likely to harden their resistance than the definite declarations that our war-aim is victory, especially when coupled with indefiniteness as to our peace-aims. The more intent the Allies appear to attain a military decision that would enable them to impose a peace of their own choosing, the less inclined will the German people be to credit their assertions that they have no vindictive aims—and the stiffer the obstacle they will raise in their own path.

To make victory your primary aim is inevitably a menace—to the other side. The merest common sense should show that, unless it is plain that you can fulfil your threat, it is

The Current of War

bound to have an effect contrary to your purpose—consolidating the enemy's troops and people behind their leaders. The real defeatists throughout history have been the men who defeated their country's true purpose by pushing their countrymen to attempt more than was practicable, thereby paving the way to exhaustion, if not to disaster.

Where two sides are so evenly matched to offer neither a reasonable chance of early success, the statesman is wise who can take a lesson from the psychology of strategy. It is an elementary principle of strategy that, if you find your opponent in a strong position that would be too costly to assault, you should leave him a line of retreat, as the quickest way of loosening his resistance. It should, equally, be a principle of war policy to provide your opponent with a ladder by which he can climb down.

Our statesmen ought, in the first place, to concentrate on hammering into the Germans' minds by every possible means the iron logic of the present situation, that both peoples will be losers from its continuance. They are much more likely to see that plain fact if we do not obscure it by cloudy talk of ultimate victory. And once their eyes are opened, they are more likely to realize its logical implication—that, as the present occupiers of other people's territory, it lies with them to find an acceptable basis of peace.

It will not harm our people's morale to hear that a decisive victory is improbable—it is proverbial that they give their best when they know the worst, and nothing braces them like a cold douche. The German people, being always more carefully screened from the truth, are more susceptible to its chilling impact. So if a spreading realization of the futility of seeking victory weakens anybody's resistance, that effect is much more likely to be on their side.

To hasten the process, however, it is important to produce something more than even the strongest of negative arguments. We need a creative idea. Our thought should be

'The Psychological War'

directed, without delay, towards evolving a constructive and dynamic peace-plan that will have a positive appeal for the mass of the people in the opposing country, as well as in our own. It should go further than merely to convince them that by peace they can avoid losing what they already enjoy. It should be of such a nature that will show them that they have much to gain, individually and collectively, from sharing in such a peace. To that end, its design must meet not only the need for national security but the individual's need for economic security.

Nothing would have more promise of curing the German people's inclination to support a policy of aggression, or be a better tonic to our own people.

CHAPTER XVIII

"SHOULD WE GO TO THE ASSISTANCE OF THE FINNS?"

Early in February I was asked by Mr. Frank Owen, the Editor of the *Evening Standard*, to deal with the question, which so many people were asking—in the words of the above title. At first I hesitated, but then undertook it, for the reasons stated in the article. It appeared on February 10.

Following the partition of Poland, the Soviet Government had lost no time in securing strategic control of Russia's old-time buffer-territories in the Baltic. By October 10 it had concluded pacts with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania which enabled its forces to garrison key-points in those countries. On the 9th conversations began with Finland. On the 14th the Soviet Government formulated its demands. According to the Finnish White Book, these were defined as having three main purposes.

First, to cover the sea approach to Leningrad, by (a) "making it possible to block the Gulf of Finland by artillery from both coasts, to prevent enemy warships or transports entering the Gulf; (b) making it possible to prevent any enemy gaining access to the islands in the Gulf of Finland situated west and north-west of the entrance to Leningrad." For this purpose the Finns were asked to cede the islands of Hogland, Seiskari, Lavanskari, Tytarskari, Loivisto, in exchange for other territories; also to lease the port of Hangö for thirty years so that the Russians might there establish a naval base with coastal artillery, capable, in conjunction with the naval base at Paldaski on the opposite coast, of blocking access to the Gulf of Finland.

Second, to provide better cover on the land approach to Leningrad by moving back the Finnish frontier in the Karelian Isthmus, to a line which would be out of heavy artillery range of Leningrad. (This was the equivalent of asking that a frontier approximately as close to Leningrad as Tilbury is to

“Should We Go to the Assistance of the Finns?”

London should be moved back as far as Southend. The readjustments of the frontier would still have left intact the main defences on the Mannerheim Line.)

Third, to adjust the frontier in the far north “in the Petsamo region, where the frontier was badly and artificially drawn.” (It was a straight line running through the narrow isthmus of the Rybachi peninsula and cutting off the western end of that peninsula. This readjustment was apparently designed to safeguard the sea approach to Murmansk by preventing an enemy establishing himself on the Rybachi peninsula.)

In exchange for these readjustments of territory the Soviet Union offered to cede to Finland the districts of Repola and Porajorpi—an exchange which, according to the Finnish White Book, would have given Finland an additional 2134 square miles in compensation for the cession to Russia of areas totalling 1066 square miles.

An objective examination of these terms suggest that they were framed on a rational basis, to provide a greater security to Russian territory without serious detriment to the security of Finland. They would, clearly, have hindered the use of Finland as a jumping-off point for any German attack on Russia. But they would not have given Russia any appreciable advantage for an attack on Finland. Indeed, the territory which Russia offered to cede to Finland would have widened Finland's uncomfortably narrow waistline.

National sentiment, however, made it hard for the Finns to agree to a settlement on these lines. While they expressed willingness to cede all the islands except Hogland, they were adamant about leaving the port of Hangö on the mainland—contending that this would be inconsistent with their policy of strict neutrality. The Russians then offered to buy this piece of territory, arguing that such a purchase would be in accord with Finland's neutrality obligations. The Finns, however, refused this offer. The discussions became acrimonious, the tone of Russian Press comment became threatening, and on November 28 the Soviet Government cancelled the non-aggression treaty of 1932. On the 30th the Russian invasion began.

The stubbornness of the Finns' resistance made a great impression abroad, and the longer it continued, the stronger grew the idea, in Britain and France, of sending forces to

The Current of War

Finland—not only to buttress her resistance, but as an indirect move against Germany : by converting Scandinavia into an Allied advance-post.

The course of the military operations is discussed in Chapter XIX.

THE request to write an article on this pressing question was an unwelcome one. I have undertaken it only because it is a question that everyone ought to face. This article will be painfully slow to write. For it is an effort to clear my own mind, not to advocate the products of a made-up mind. Although I have been thinking for some time over various aspects of the problem, I do not yet know, at the start of the article, what conclusions I shall reach at the end. Or whether I shall arrive at any.

That is my position before I start writing, for I believe that the scientific attitude of complete detachment from any preferences as to one's conclusions offers the best chance of getting anywhere near a right conclusion. It should be unnecessary to add that such detachment involves no lack of sympathy, but merely cuts out its interference during the study of a problem, so that the view of the evidence shall not be coloured or deflected by feeling.

The problem as put to me in the present instance is whether *we* should go to the assistance of the Finns. We have already undertaken, under our League obligations, to furnish them with arms, so that the only question in that respect is how far it would be good to increase such aid. The main problem, since it is a question of kind rather than merely of degree, is whether we should support the Finns with armed forces. So we ought to consider it in the first place.

But it is important as a preliminary, in gauging the scale of the problem, that we should get as clear an idea as possible of Finland's need for such assistance. Her resistance so

“Should We Go to the Assistance of the Finns?”

far has surprised the world. It has earned immense admiration for the spirit of her troops and the skill with which they have been handled. It has, at the same time, lowered the prestige of the Red Army.

While the sheer size of Soviet Russia's available forces justifies the tributes paid to the Finns, the depreciation of the Russians may have been carried too far to be true. Because of the widespread bias against the Soviet regime that exists in many countries, a purely scientific analysis must guard against the tendency of their military judgments to be influenced by their political feelings.

On examination, it becomes clear that the conditions of the terrain in Finland, combined with the period of the year, have been highly favourable to the Finns' resistance. They have naturally strengthened the advantages which defence normally enjoys in modern war. It would be hard to find conditions so exceptionally favourable to it as they have been in Finland.

Again, it would appear from a good deal of evidence that the Soviet authorities badly miscalculated the amount of resistance they were likely to meet. They seem to have imagined that their forces would have to do little more than support a popular rising among a people who were largely disposed to welcome them. The collapse of such “castles in the air” is a characteristic accompaniment of authoritarian systems, wherein wishful thinking has no corrective from independent-minded criticism.

While there is considerable evidence, also, pointing to inefficiency, the strategic conditions and political miscalculations would suffice to explain the limited results that the invaders have hitherto attained. And it is well to remember the lesson of history that no army, nor any institution, can bear close examination without revealing serious flaws.

In any case, the difference of potential strength between the two sides is so immense that it would be wise to assume

The Current of War

that sheer weight is bound to be decisive sooner or later, if Stalin is driven to exert it.

That conclusion might have to be modified if Sweden had decided to give Finland her full backing. So great are the inherent advantages of the defence, and so suitable is Finland's terrain for a mobile defence, that it is at least possible that a permanent deadlock could be established—provided that the reinforcement arrived in time and the combined forces were assured of an ample supply of munitions from abroad.

It is doubtful, however, whether the same result could be attained, and maintained, if Britain and France sent forces to Finland while Sweden remained neutral. In that case, their forces would have to be shipped to Finland by the Arctic port of Petsamo in the extreme north of Finland—since the Baltic would be impassable. From Petsamo there is no railway southward; only a road. And they would have to land under the fire of the Russians, who have the Murmansk railway by which to bring up reinforcements and supplies. Under such circumstances it is difficult to see that any Allied expeditionary force—even if it arrived before the Finns were overcome—could avoid being strategically “frozen,” while the chances of disaster would be considerable. Moreover, the combined force that Britain and France could spare for Finland's succour, without jeopardizing their security in the West, could hardly equal that which Sweden might deploy on the Finnish front if she so decided.

For Sweden, such a decision might be easy if she had only to consider the risk from Russia. It is wiser to forestall danger, by meeting it in advance—whether of space or time—than to wait until it knocks at your door. But with the German-Soviet Pact, Sweden's situation has become perilously complicated. Any movement of her forces northward leaves her exposed to a German move from the south. It is understandable that she hesitates to risk such a development.

“Should We Go to the Assistance of the Finns?”

If she were to accept the risk, with Norway's co-operation, Franco-British reinforcements could reach her more easily than they could otherwise reach Finland. But they could hardly be much larger than the force which might be spared for Finland's help. And it would be optimistic to assume that such a scale of reinforcement would suffice to buttress the defence of both Finland and Sweden in a Baltic struggle wherein the combined forces of Germany and Russia were deployed on the other side.

Such a combination of the two largest military Powers in the world would be the almost inevitable result of our action if we “spread” our present war to the Baltic. It could only be balanced, if at all, by the United States throwing her full resources into the scales. Even if she were induced to do so, which is very dubious, her latent strength could hardly be exerted in time to check the invasion of the Scandinavian countries.

The power of modern defence, intensified by the resolute spirit of the Scandinavian peoples, might succeed in bringing the invaders to a halt before they could complete their conquest. But any partial occupation they achieved would create the problem of turning them out. In such a struggle they would, having had time to consolidate their lodgment, profit in their turn from the power of modern defence.

Thus we are brought to the conclusion, unpalatable as it may be, that for us to assist Finland by the despatch of forces would be more likely to do harm than good to the general cause of the democratic countries—by precipitating the issue that it is desirable strategically to avoid if possible: that of driving Russia and Germany more deeply into each other's arms.

It is obvious that we cannot send forces to Finland without coming into direct conflict with Russia. Already, in seeking victory against Germany we are faced by the awkward fact that 2 and 2 do not make 12. That problem can hardly be solved by adopting a policy which would require that

The Current of War

2 and 2 should equal 24, or even more—as would be the case if, having added Russia to Germany, we set out to defeat the combination.

The “Charge of the Light Brigade” was foolish enough as minor tactics, but would be far worse as grand strategy.

We are thus brought back to the narrower question of sending arms to the Finns. The instinctive feeling of the mass of our people urges such aid, and strategic reasoning supports it up to a point. The more that can be effectively done to show that aggression is a costly business the better for all peacefully minded nations. The greater the resistance that the Finns can put up, the larger the diversion of war supplies which Russia might otherwise be persuaded to furnish to Germany. But there remains the difficulty of increased friction with Russia.

Since American sympathy with Finland is so keen, and America has no war already on her hands, she would be the natural source from which war supplies could best be provided to Finland. If she were disposed to waive objections, we ought to be willing to forgo temporarily in Finland's favour the additional arms we are obtaining from the United States, and to provide shipping for their transport across the Atlantic.

CHAPTER XIX

CAN FINLAND HOLD OUT?

This was written in the middle of February, as a general survey of the Finnish War up to that time. In the week that preceded its publication on February 25, the question of sending an Allied force to Finland had become more acute. I was asked to touch upon this problem, and accordingly wrote the four fresh paragraphs with which the article begins.

WHEN the Russians invaded Finland at the end of November, the general condemnation of their action in Britain and France was accompanied by resignation towards her inevitable fate. There was, in these countries, no serious thought of trying to prevent it. But with the unexpected prolongation of her resistance emotions have been increasingly stirred. And now that the prospect of Finland's collapse follows months of gallant fighting on her part—months, also, of time lost by any would-be helpers—there is a growing impulse to send Allied forces thither.

From the point of view of the British and French Governments, much can be said both for and against such a project. The most obvious argument for it is that, besides showing them to have become active champions of any small country threatened with aggression, it would offer them an alternative line of military activity to that in the West, which has come to look like a road marked "no through way." A new line would be, at least for a time, a relief to the sense of stagnation; and it is hoped, naturally, that it would prove something more.

The most obvious argument against the project is that it

The Current of War

would commit us definitely to war against Russia, thus doubling or even trebling the numerical odds already against us—especially if we are aiming at victory.

Whatever view may be taken as to the merits of these arguments, from a strategic point of view it is apparent that no adequate effort could be made without the co-operation of Norway and Sweden—and this would require a change in the attitude of negotiation they have just reaffirmed. In any case, the proper consideration of the problem should start with a careful examination of Finland's present situation and prospects.

What are the sure facts about the Finnish War? It is clear that the Finns have put up a grand resistance against the invading forces of a country immensely larger than their own. It is clear that the original Russian plan broke down badly, and that its successor has been slow to show adequate results for the expenditure of life and munitions. It is clear that the advantage of the defence in modern war has here been proved in a way that has surprised the world. But not much beyond these few salient facts is yet clear.

In the fog of war, partial impressions are the normal substitute for facts. And that fog has been thickened by elaborate censorship more than it has been dissipated by modern means of communication. Beyond the effect of formal censorship, the public atmosphere—created by popular wish-thinking combined with official secrecy, and mendacity, tends to stifle the truth even in so far as this could be discovered in such misty conditions.

Twenty years of exploring the history of the last war, after taking part in it, have taught me that events as they actually happened are very different from the picture of them that is formed, or given, at the time. That process of uncovering the facts has also left me with no illusions about the veracity of official sources in any country at war. A state of war is always a spur as well as a cloak to imaginative exaggeration, or sheer invention. If the authorities of

Can Finland Hold Out?

some countries are better than others, it is because they are wiser, rather than because of their devotion to truth as such. Where practical wisdom prevails, there will be care to avoid statements that are hard to swallow, or easy to disprove. But the ruling idea is not to admit more than cannot be concealed.

If there is practical reason for such a policy of limited truthfulness in the waging of war, it is inevitably a hindrance in forming an accurate picture of events and reaching a sound judgment as to the way they may develop.

I have dwelt on these conditions—which obscure the view not only of the public but even of the best-informed military intelligence services—as a general warning rather than with particular reference to the campaign in Finland.

There is, too, a special factor which complicates the process of reaching true military conclusions about that campaign. This factor is the deep-seated prejudice against "Communism" which prevails in most countries—for nothing closes up the average man's mind more firmly than affixing a coloured label to the subject under consideration. In general, soldiers are less inclined than civilians to under-rate the forces which are, or may be, opposed to them. But in the case of the Russian forces it is hard for them to detach their military thought from an instinctive prejudice against "the Reds," which has all the stronger reaction because their natural conservatism in politics is stiffened by the offence that the Red Army's system of political commissars gives to their professional sense.

As a result they tend to judge it by a standard which would not be applied to armies with which they had more feeling of professional kinship, and to regard any failure of its plans as confirmation of its fundamental inefficiency. A scientific analysis must guard against the tendency of such military judgments to be influenced by political and professional feelings.

When the knowable conditions of the Finnish campaign

The Current of War

are examined, they provide in themselves a reasonable explanation of the comparative ineffectiveness of the Russian invasion.

Whereas conditions in Poland were more favourable to a *blitzkrieg* offensive than anywhere else in Europe, Finland offered a most unsuitable theatre for such a performance, especially at the time of the year when the invasion was staged.

The geographical encirclement of the Polish frontier was intensified by the network of the German communications and the scarcity of the Polish. The open nature of the country offered a scope for the thrusts of mechanized forces that was guaranteed by the dry September weather. The Polish Army was even more wedded to the offensive tradition than most armies, and thus all the weaker in utilizing its sparse means of defensive action.

In Finland, by contrast, the defender profited by having a much better system of internal communications, both rail and road, than the attacker possessed on the far side of that frontier. The Finns had several lines of railway parallel to the frontier for the rapid lateral switching of their reserves; the Russians had only the solitary line from Leningrad to Murmansk. And from that 800-mile-long railway there was only one branch leading to the Finnish frontier. Elsewhere, the Russians would have to advance anything from 50 to 150 miles from the railway before crossing the frontier, and considerably further still before they could threaten any point of strategic importance. That advance, moreover, had to be made through a country of lakes and forests, and over poor roads that were now deep in snow.

These difficulties set a narrow limit to the forces which the Soviet Union could move and maintain, except in a direct advance through the Karelian Isthmus between Lake Ladoga and the Gulf of Finland—against the Mannerheim Line. This neck of land, if 70 miles wide on the map, is

Can Finland Hold Out ?

much less in strategic reality. Half of it is barred by the broad Vuoksi River, while much of the remainder is covered by a series of lakes, with forests between them. Only in the right centre near Summa is there room for deploying any considerable force.

Moreover, beyond the strategic difficulties of assembling any large forces on the apparently exposed parts of the Finnish frontier and pushing them deep into the enemy's country, lay the tactical difficulty of overcoming the resistance of defenders who knew the ground and were able to exploit its advantages. Much of Finland is ideal country for delaying action, for setting tactical traps, and for mobile ripostes. Lakes and forests tend to shepherd an invading force into narrow channels of advance where it can be swept by machine-gun fire ; they offer innumerable opportunities for concealed flanking manœuvres as well as for guerilla harassing. To penetrate into such a country in face of a skilful foe would be hazardous enough in summer ; it was much more difficult to attempt in the Arctic winter, when heavy columns are as clumsy as a man in clogs trying to grapple with an opponent in gym-shoes.

The limits set by nature and the railway to the amount of force that Russia could use from her vast resources appear to have been further restricted by the miscalculations of the Soviet authorities. It would seem fairly clear that they did not contemplate meeting serious resistance, but imagined that they would hardly have to do more than back up a popular rising of the Finnish people against their Government.

The original Russian plan would seem to have comprised a four-pronged thrust across the main stretch of the Finnish frontier from Lake Ladoga to the Arctic Ocean, combined with a demonstration in force against the Karelian Isthmus to pin the Finnish reserves there. Three of the prongs—those pushed in near Petsamo, Salla, and Suomussalmi respectively—were of very light composition, probably consisting of no more than an infantry division apiece. The

The Current of War

southernmost prong, inserted just north of Lake Ladoga, seems to have comprised two divisions. In the Karelian Isthmus, facing the Mannerheim Line, there were, according to neutral reports, some three divisions with four more nearby in reserve. But these were merely to feel their way forward until the Finns' resistance weakened under flank and internal pressure.

To oppose this invasion, the Finns are reported to have had six active divisions on mobilization, and six reserve divisions in process of formation. In addition there was the Civic Guard, a comparatively well-trained force of 100,000 men, suited to defend its own localities.

At the outset, the six active divisions available appear to have been concentrated in the south, while the local militia covered the rest of the frontier. But when the main Russian advance, intended to turn the Mannerheim Line, disclosed itself on the north side of Lake Ladoga, two of those divisions were despatched thither, and effectively countered the thrust. In the far north, the Russians had meantime cut off Petsamo, and thereby deprived the Finns of the chance of supplies reaching them through that Arctic port. More dangerous still was the thrust across the Finnish waistline, which penetrated almost half-way to the Baltic before it was, first, stopped, and then driven back by a Finnish division railed up hurriedly from the south. Still more effective was the counter to the third prong of the Russian invasion, which had been pushed in at Suomussalmi. For, after the repulse of the southernmost prong, part of the force which had made the counter-stroke there was diverted northward against the flank of the Russians advancing past Suomussalmi. Closing their line of supply and retreat, the Finns waited until the troops were exhausted by cold and hunger, and then broke up not merely its advance, but the division itself.

If Field-Marshal Mannerheim obviously took risks in keeping all his reserves in the extreme south until the

Can Finland Hold Out?

Russians had shown their hand, his strategy was justified on the whole by the opportunities which the enemy's initial penetrations offered to subsequent counter-strokes—especially in that kind of country under winter conditions.

As for the Russians, it is only to be expected that plans which have been based on a false assumption should break down when put to the test of reality. But that is not of itself proof of military inefficiency throughout the army concerned. While authoritarian regimes are particularly susceptible to the kind of reports on the situation which accord with their wishes, no type of government is immune from such risks. It is wise to remember that perhaps the greatest of all false assumptions in modern history was that on which the French offensive plan in 1914 was based.

The most unfortunate consequence of the Russian miscalculation over Finland was its almost inevitable effect on their policy. If fear be the root cause of war, it is not only the fear of material insecurity but the fear of "losing face." Both kinds of fear can be detected in the causation of the Russian attack on Finland, as well as in that of the larger war which broke out in September. Last November, Russia's desire to make her position in the Baltic secure while the opportunity offered itself was reinforced by the second factor. Indeed, *The Times* correspondent suggested on December 8: "Probably the determining factor was one of prestige. The Soviet Union made the mistake of publishing its demands without discovering whether the Finns could be made to accept them without war."

Any student of history has abundant cause to realize how fateful, for ill, is stubborn human pride.

The primary effect of the Finns' successful resistance, or of the way that other countries hailed it as proof of Soviet inefficiency, was that Russia was impelled to press on with the war, and with a devastation of Finland that she had obviously desired to avoid—in order to retrieve the prestige of the Red Army.

The Current of War

The idea that the eventual conquest of Finland will have any such effect is likely to prove a mistaken one. No real credit is gained by a big boy or nation from beating a small one. And those who are instinctively prejudiced against Soviet Russia will be all the more inclined to dismiss any such result as merely due to overwhelming numbers. But their earlier expression of contempt for the Russians' inefficiency will have helped to harden the latter's determination to press the campaign to a conclusion, thus ensuring the devastation of Finland, if not still greater evils.

There is nothing to equal the deep study of war for revealing the immensity of the suffering that ensues from the petty pride and prejudices which are a common characteristic of human nature.

When spring comes, and the state of the ground allows the Russians to employ a much larger proportion of their total forces, it can hardly be expected that the Finns can parry the wide range of thrusts that will then become practicable. With a frontier of nearly 1000 miles, it must be questionable whether they could do so even if Sweden reinforced them with the bulk of her forces, or allowed the passage of Franco-British forces.

Looking at this problem from Sweden's point of view, it is not difficult to understand why her caution in neutrality has hitherto prevailed over her desire to see the Russian invasion of Finland checked. If she were to push the bulk of her forces into Finland, she would have to advance from a frontier that is strong in its narrowness—only along a front of some 60 miles inland from the coast could an attack be effectively attempted there—in order to help in holding a frontier that is weak in its wideness. Moreover, her forces would be dependent for supply on the solitary line of railway round the Gulf of Bothnia, while any part of them which was used to stiffen the main defences of Finland might be cut off and lost if the Russians succeeded in getting a tight grip on Finland's waist. Besides these risks, Sweden has to

Can Finland Hold Out ?

reckon with the possibility of a German attack from the south while her forces were thus engaged in the north.

In meeting such a threat she may count on receiving all possible support from Britain and France. And the difficulties with which a German invasion would be faced should not be underrated. This is not a theatre where the Germans could exert their full weight. Any invading forces would have to cross the Baltic, and a preliminary occupation of Denmark would merely diminish, not avoid, the water passage. Under modern conditions the difficulties and hazards of carrying out a sea-borne invasion are much greater than ever in the past. For any adequate chance of success it is necessary not only to have secure control of the sea but to dominate the air—since no operation of war is so vulnerable to air attack as a landing on a hostile shore. Thus, with Norwegian agreement, Allied support in the essential elements might go far to assure Sweden's security.

At the same time, Scandinavia would become the battleground. It is natural that the Scandinavian states should be reluctant to invite such a change of scene, with its prospect of their bearing the brunt of the war, and of at least one of their members, Denmark, being engulfed by Germany. For while invasion has become more difficult under modern conditions of war, so has the ejection of an invader from any lodgment he may gain.

Weighing the comparative strength of Germany and Russia combined against that of Britain and France, and viewing their own proximity to the former Powers, it is but natural that the Scandinavian States, who can still look at the situation from the more detached point of view of the proverbial onlooker, should have doubts of the capacity of the Western Powers to inflict a decisive defeat on a combination of Germany and Russia. And unless such a result could be achieved, the Scandinavian States feel that they might become in perpetuity an exposed outpost position facing the main forces of two permanently hostile Powers.

CHAPTER XX

MIDDLE EAST WAR ?

In the opening months of 1940 there was a mounting wave of uncalculating pugnacity, both in Britain and France, which was most obviously manifested in speeches and articles urging the idea of "opening up" the war against Germany. That cry was voiced by men who, from knowledge of the respective balance of strength, ought to have known better than to advocate forcing an issue at a time when the Allied forces were so inadequate—especially their air and mechanized forces. Yet, in reckless disregard of the consequence, and blind to what lay ahead, they were eager not only to initiate a bombing match with Germany but also to seek a way of striking at her flanks by way of her neighbours. They appeared to welcome the prospect of pushing Russia into Germany's arms, while disregarding the opportunity thus opened to Germany of striking in the West while the Allies' attention was occupied, and their forces entangled, in distant theatres. While our forces would have had to go a very long way, it seemed to me the shortest way to precipitate a danger that was already grave enough.

Coincidentally with the demand for sending an Allied expeditionary force to Scandinavia, to take part in the Finnish War, there was an increasing suggestion that we should strike at the Russian oil fields in the Caucasus with a view to preventing Germany getting any benefit from that source of petrol supply. In the last week of February I was asked by the *Evening Standard* to deal with this much-discussed question, and did so in an article which appeared on March 2. Owing to pressure of space that week-end the article had to be condensed to fit it in, so that most of the early part was cut out. It is here, however, printed in full.

FOR four years before the war came, ever since the crisis caused by Italy's invasion of Abyssinia, the Middle East was in the foreground of European politics. But with

Middle East War ?

Italy's decision to remain neutral it suddenly disappeared into the background. Although it was known that the British garrisons there had been considerably reinforced from India, and also that the French garrison of Syria had been expanded much beyond its peace-time strength, the details and dispositions were concealed by a thicker veil of secrecy even than that which covered the West. Other news was almost as scanty.

But the arrival at Suez of the first Australian and New Zealand contingents a fortnight ago was preceded and accompanied by a spate of portentous if cryptic references in the Press to the assembly of a great Franco-British army in the Middle East. A figure of 500,000 was mentioned as an estimate of its strength. The impression was reinforced, if the figure was modified, by a French semi-official correction to the effect that the total was something less.

Under war-time conditions of censorship, especially abroad, such reports do not get an outlet save with a purpose beyond mere news interest. And only the future historian may be able to discover whether they received publicity as a deterrent or with a positive aim. They were published at a moment when there had been reports not only of German diplomatic pressure on Turkey, but of Russian military developments—road-building and troop concentrations—on the Caucasus frontier. They also coincided with the marked growth of an opinion here favourable to the idea of circumventing the stalemate in the west by "spreading the war" either northward or eastward.

Since Germany presents no accessible strategic flanks, the suggestion has been made, on the assumption that Russia is to be considered her ally, that we may find a "*via victoria*" round the "West Wall" by attacking the presumed weaker partner. This may be a dangerous assumption in view of the fact that, so far as numbers count, it leads to the further assumption that if 2 and 2 cannot make 12 they can amount to more than 24. In other words, that if we cannot see

The Current of War

how to attain the necessary ratio of superiority for a successful offensive against Germany, we may find a way of achieving it by treating Russia and Germany as a combination. Flights of strategic fancy are often accompanied by a disregard for military arithmetic, while the further they travel the more apt they are to discount the knowable facts. We have recently seen how such soaring projects can skim over the practical difficulties of conducting a campaign in Finland. If these fantasies can survive the cold, clear atmosphere of the North, how much more easily can they arise in the mind which is susceptible to the spell of the Middle East—the source of the *Arabian Nights*. The most improbable things seem possible in such an atmosphere.

There, for many years, the conflicting interests of Russia and Britain have produced a state of apprehension. Whatever substance there was in the grounds for it, this was far exceeded by the product of military imagination. Indeed, the "Russian bogey" which dominated our scheme of Imperial Defence for nearly a century is only matched by the obsession of a British "Imperialist plot" which has been a cloud on the Soviet horizon during the past generation. However unfounded, any fair-minded observer can understand how this was the natural legacy of our 1918 expedition to North Russia, which, having gone thither to preserve that area from the Germans, we turned into a campaign against the Soviet regime—and repeatedly took the offensive on the plea that "attack was the best defence." On our side, the fresh lease of life given to the Russian bogey since the last war by the authorities in India had a justification in the activities of Communist propaganda, if it had no adequate foundation in the state of the strategic communications on the far side of the frontier. Those who fostered it were often ready to admit, privately, that they found it useful as an argument for preserving the scale of the British Army during the post-war years of short-sighted retrenchment.

Middle East War ?

The maintenance of the Army in India at a scale beyond the necessity at least provided a surplus for the emergency reinforcement of the middle "Middle East." At the same time, it hindered not only the reorganization of our forces at home, but the redistribution of our forces as a whole in such a way as to provide an adequate insurance against the actual dangers which we have run in Egypt and the Sudan during these last few years.

The size of the garrison of India remained almost unchanged for the eighty years following the Indian Mutiny—when it was established as approximately 60,000 British and double that number of Indian troops—despite its comparative inaccessibility to invasion and the increasing advantages with which modern weapons and modern means of communication, the railway and the motor endowed it for maintaining internal security.

In the Middle East, by contrast, there has been a vast growth of our responsibilities during the past half century, while the territories we have to guard there have become far more exposed to danger especially in recent years. Yet in 1937 the British troops maintained overseas for the defence of the Empire exclusive of India amounted to only 38,000 men compared with 26,000 in 1870. This was a very modest increase. For the whole of the Middle East the total was only 19,000—less than 12,000 in Egypt, 2,000 in the Sudan, and 5,000 in Palestine. Even the main force in Egypt was slender compared with the size of the Italian forces in Libya, although here the difficulties of crossing the Western Desert could be reckoned a compensation, and the French forces in Tunis a counterbalance. But for the Sudan a figure of 2,000 British troops to supplement a local Defence Force of 5,000 was absurdly disproportionate to the estimated total of 100,000 white troops and as many native troops, together with a great mass of motor transport, which Italy held in her neighbouring East African territory.

A fresh study of the problem of Imperial Defence in 1937

The Current of War

led me to the following conclusions. First, that an increase in the strength of the Middle East garrisons was necessary in view of the risk which might be run in trying to reinforce them after the outbreak of war, especially if Italy were hostile. Second, that if the increase was to be kept within economic bounds, we must do more to exploit the possibilities of mechanization; for the defence of these far-stretching frontiers and vast desert tracts, mobile troops of the modern type would often be of more value than infantry, and fewer would be required proportionately to the area that had to be covered. Third, that the increase of force should be mainly used to form a regional strategic reserve, of at least two divisions, which could reinforce any threatened part, rather than for fixed increments to each local garrison. Lastly, that a considerable part of the troops in India should be earmarked and equipped, with modern weapons, as a further strategic reserve for the Middle East in emergency.

Although these conclusions were accepted in principle, their fulfilment was perilously slow. In 1938 the forces in Egypt were only increased by one light tank battalion, and although in the autumn crisis the mobile troops there were nominally formed into an armoured division the further units needed to make it a reality were not provided. Nor were the three mechanized brigades which I had urged as being necessary in the Sudan, Kenya, and British Somaliland—to counter possible moves from Italian East Africa. Additional infantry battalions had been despatched to Palestine in the summer to deal with the trouble there, and some of these later became available as the nucleus of a Middle East strategic reserve. But the release of troops from India to augment it was delayed until the war was close upon us, and most of the reinforcements seem to have come subsequently.

Fortunately, perhaps, Italy's neutrality removed the risk of any immediate strain being put on our defensive prepara-

Middle East War ?

tions before they were ready. And as the months have passed the focus of danger has shifted northwards. The first new contingency which appeared on the horizon was that of giving support to Turkey in meeting a German move in the Balkans. More recently, attention has been directed to the alternative or complementary risks of a Russian descent past Turkey's eastern flank, into Iran or Iraq—endangering the oil-fields.

It might seem that Russia, even if she has the desire, is unlikely to embark on new ventures while she is occupied with Finland. Against this view it may be argued that the more inclination the Allies show towards reinforcing the Finns' resistance the more reason for the Soviet to launch elsewhere a distraction to their minds and forces. And, because of the way that sparse communications limit the scale of the forces that Russia can employ on the Finnish front, the campaign there can hardly absorb so large a part of her vast resources as to forbid the possibility of starting another campaign.

If it were to be attempted, its prospects of success would largely be governed by the state of the Russian communications on the Caspian front in relation to two other main factors—the attitude which Turkey takes ; the time and scale of reinforcement from French and British resources in the Middle East. If Turkey were willing and able to join with the Allies in resisting such a penetration the co-operation of her forces would make a big difference to the chances of checking the advance—which would in any case be handicapped by the difficult country it would have to traverse. Without Turkey's help the problem of effective resistance would be much harder. For, in regard to Franco-British reinforcement of Iran, it would not only be a question of scanty communications, but of the extent to which the Allies could safely denude the strategic reserves held in the Middle East—to meet other possible developments closer to their bases.

The Current of War

As for the suggestion of an Allied offensive into Trans-Caucasia, this, for similar reasons, can hardly be regarded as a promising venture. The one strategically accessible point of importance is the western end of the Russian oil pipe-line at Batum. This could only be attacked with Turkey's co-operation, and although it is so close to the Turkish frontier the relative conditions of the communications on either side are more favourable to its successful defence than to any land attack. If Turkey were willing to depart from her neutrality, which is dubious unless she were directly threatened, it would be simpler for the Allied navies to attain the same purpose by blockading the port of Batum, so that the oil could not be shipped.

We are left to consider the idea recently mooted that the Allied air forces might bomb the oil-wells at Baku and thereby cripple the capacity of Germany as well as Russia to maintain a long war. If there were a *probability* of achieving such a result it would be a simple solution of the extremely difficult problem that faces us in this war. But in all experience of air bombing hitherto there would seem to be no adequate promise that any such decisive effect could be achieved. Thus, unless and until Russia definitely commits herself to an offensive military alliance with Germany, it would be folly to gamble on a long-odds chance that would inevitably precipitate such a combination. The idea is all the less inviting because the Middle East hardly fulfils the required properties of a secure base for offensive action, since within its orbit there is such a range of possible permutations and combinations.

Turkey's importance in the scheme of Middle East defence can hardly be overrated. That fact has a significant reflection on the way that, through diplomatic short-sightedness and the Admiralty's action in requisitioning her battle-ships, we helped to push her into the enemy's camp in the last war, and thereby added immensely to our burdens and complications. It should at least be a warning against

Middle East War ?

present haste in assuming and precipitating the definite hostility of Russia—a still larger weight in the balance of both Europe and Asia.

While I was aware that the talk about a great Allied striking force in the Middle East of half a million men was fantastic—which the German Intelligence Service must have known, much better than our public—it was not possible to contradict such a statement at the time. Events, however, soon dispelled the fantasy ; since, after the surrender of France, the very limited scale of the French forces in Syria was made known. Unfortunately, the discussion of possible action through Turkey against the Caucasus had gone far enough not only to prejudice the improvement of our relations with Russia, but to disturb Russo-Turkish relations. Those who, in their offensive spirit, so ardently canvassed offensive aims without regard to whether the means were available may not have been very formidable dragons—but they at least scattered a lot of dragons' teeth about the world.

PART V

THE STORM BREAKS—OVER SCANDINAVIA

CHAPTER XXI

THE INVASION OF NORWAY

On April 4 Mr. Chamberlain, addressing the Central Council of the Conservative Party, declared that "now after seven months of war I feel ten times as confident of victory as I did at the beginning." It was a very extraordinary thing that Hitler had not made an endeavour to overwhelm France and Britain at the outset, using his initial superiority. Whatever might be the reason, "one thing is certain: he missed the bus." The Prime Minister subsequently gave a clear hint of coming steps to extend the blockade, and check Germany's exploitation of Scandinavian neutrality.

On the morning of April 9 the chief feature in the newspapers was the announcement that, early the previous morning, the British Navy had laid minefields in Norwegian territorial waters to stop German ships using them as a corridor to the high seas. The papers also contained a report that German warships had been seen steaming north from the Baltic to the Kattegat.

The significance of this news was swiftly superseded, however, by the news which the radio gave—that the Germans had already invaded Denmark and landed at various points in Norway. That afternoon Mr. Chamberlain was unable to give Parliament any more definite news than that there had been landings at Bergen and Trondheim as well as on the south coast. "There have been some reports about a similar landing at Narvik, but I am very doubtful whether they are correct."

Mr. Gerald Barry, the editor of the *News Chronicle*, rang up at midday and asked me to comment on the situation which had thus arisen. After reflection I agreed to do so, as it seemed to me that there were factors affecting our counter-steps which urgently needed emphasis, and that the strategic configuration of Norway might make it possible to steer a

The Current of War

reasonably clear course through the fog of conflicting reports and the darkness of official communiqués. Moreover, having been able at last to express my views about the general problem of the war, I felt more free to deal with its particular aspects. So I wrote the following initial commentary :

“ WE MUST LOSE NO TIME ”

(April 9, 1940)

THE dramatic news of the German invasion of Denmark and Norway has naturally come as a shock. It is likely to have far-reaching repercussions. But, from a military point of view, the fact that the Germans have been able to establish themselves there can only surprise those who lack an understanding of the elements of strategy or the basic factors of the actual situation in Scandinavia. The initial success of any such German coup was almost inevitable as regards Denmark, and highly probable as regards southern Norway. If further explanation must be awaited of the way that the Germans managed to secure the ports on the west coast of Norway, the general prospects of a suddenly delivered yet well-planned move against these two countries were manifestly favoured by the geographical position combined with their own defensive weakness. Germany's inherent advantage in that theatre could only be ignored or underrated through a failure to grasp the elementary law of strategic accessibility. Those who have ardently clamoured for vigorous action by the Allies in various quarters without regard to such reasoned calculations may now look foolish. But a proper realization of the strategic conditions should diminish the shock which the news has brought to the British public, and check any tendency to exaggerate its significance. The events of to-day give cause for regret but not for dismay.

It has long been obvious that Denmark could not hope to put up any effective resistance to a German invasion. Mechanization has increased the possibility of, and the

The Invasion of Norway

German Army's capacity for, swift penetration of Jutland. And her navy, operating within the sheltered waters of the Baltic, was quite enough to dominate Copenhagen and the Danish islands—thereby achieving the aim which Moltke would have pursued in 1864 if he had not been handicapped by Prussia's naval inferiority. This occupation of the Danish-held passages into the Kattegat was a strategic requirement of any operation directed against Norway, the main objective, in order to give the invaders a sense of security as to their communications.

It was in the last stage of the approach, through the Skagerrak, that such a sea-borne expedition ran its chief risk—of interruption from the British naval forces. Hence the need of surprise, not only in order to make good a landing, but probably, to cover the outer flank with a curtain of mines, thus creating a protected corridor through which reinforcements could be passed. The risk of interference was not so great as it might seem, if due account be taken of the short final leap which the main German move had to cover, compared with the long distance between that awkward area and the British naval bases.

As for the landing itself, this would be facilitated by the flatness of the southern coast of Norway. Where the defender has powerful forces, and in particular a strong air force, a landing on a hostile coast is the most difficult operation of war. These conditions, obviously, did not exist in the case of Norway. Sweden, by comparison, might have been able to offer a considerable resistance pending the arrival of Allied reinforcements and aircraft. Thus we may note the subtlety by which the German move was directed against Norway, leaving Sweden alone yet strategically isolating her.

More audacious was that part of the German plan whereby the main ports on the west coast of Norway were seized. This was intended, clearly, to thwart an Allied counter-move to reinforce Norway's resistance. For,

The Current of War

otherwise, a situation might have resulted where the Germans held Oslo and the southern edge of the country, while the Norwegian forces backed by the Allies retained possession of the more important western coast. So far as this German flank move may have succeeded, it inevitably increases the difficulty of giving early and effective help to Norway's defence. At the least, it may gain time for additional German forces to be passed through the mined corridor to support those which have already landed in southern Norway. The importance of this result lies in the fact that under modern conditions "possession is nine points of the war." In other words, the power which defence has gained in modern warfare makes it very difficult to eject an invader who has once consolidated a foothold. It is thus essential to lose no time over any action that may be taken to counter the German move. If such steps are to have an adequate prospect, they should be already in progress.

Next day, April 10, it became clear that the Germans had succeeded in occupying all the principal ports of Norway, including Narvik, where, that morning, a gallantly attempted entry by five British destroyers was repulsed by six German destroyers supported by shore-batteries.

But the newspapers next morning, the 11th, gave far more prominence to the reports of the recapture of Bergen and Trondheim by Allied forces. This seemed to me so improbable as not to be worth mentioning in the article I wrote that day. From any calculation of time and space it was clear that, even if a force had been "on its toes" ready for immediate action, it could not have been transported to the scene in such a short time. It seemed to me far more likely that any counterstroke on our part would be too long in preparation. Being convinced that the chances of its success depended on its delivery at the earliest moment *possible*, I sought to bring out both the necessity and the opportunity for audacity, while suggesting a method of hindering the enemy's consolidation of his grip during the interval before a large and properly organized force could be landed.

The Invasion of Norway

“ A CHANCE FOR AUDACITY ”

(April 11)

Time is the essence of the strategic problem presented in Norway. The opening days may be crucial for the issue.

Audacity is needed—if the German invasion is to be effectively countered before it can consolidate its position. And an opportunity for audacity is offered.

In this important respect the situation in Norway is different from what is general in modern warfare, which affords diminishing scope for the application of the Napoleonic war maxim—actually coined by Danton—“ *l'audace, l'audace, toujours l'audace.*” Such a maxim is out of place on fortified or entrenched fronts where mass armies are deployed, and the ratio of force to space is such as to ensure a heavy density of defence on either side. Under such conditions audacity may prove to be no better than foolhardiness. Likewise, to accept the offensive as a necessity regardless of whether the conditions are suitable is a futile and suicidal course.

But in the Norwegian campaign that has just opened there is a real chance for a daring offensive on the Allies' part, so long as it is guided by a sense of the time-factor, and the means are available. The opportunity largely arises from the audacious comprehensiveness of the German plan. If this has increased the initial advantage which the Germans gained, it offers the Allies the best chance they may have of converting the invasion into a boomerang.

In venturing their ships up the west coast of Norway, in face of a much superior navy, the Germans took a big risk ; much bigger than was involved in their pounce on southern Norway, through comparatively sheltered waters. They were playing, however, for big stakes. The coup by which they seized Norway's west coast ports offered the means, not only of shutting off Allied help, but of paralysing the resistance of the Norwegians, cut off in the interior.

The Current of War

By landing at Narvik and Trondheim, as well as at Oslo, the Germans could place themselves astride all four railways leading into Sweden. The railway from Narvik, which has no connecting line with the south, runs direct to the Swedish frontier, only twenty miles distant, and thence continues past the Gallivare iron fields to the Swedish port of Lulea on the Baltic. The railway from Trondheim enters central Sweden at a point some sixty miles from the port. There is a line connecting it with Oslo; thirty miles south of Trondheim, this divides into two routes, one passing through Hamar and the other through Elverum—a branch links these two places. From Oslo there are two lines into Sweden, one running direct eastward to Stockholm, and the other down the coast to Gothenberg. The only other important railway in the country is the line from Oslo over the mountains to Bergen.

With all the terminal points of their railway system in German hands, it is inevitable that the mobilization and assembly of the Norwegian forces should be seriously hampered, and their maintenance jeopardized. Thus quick relief becomes all the more important.

The most vital area is, of course, the Skagerrak. For by this southerly channel alone can Germany hope to reinforce and send supplies to the forces she has already disembarked in Norway. To safeguard that essential line of communication the Germans may be hoping to create a protected corridor to the Oslo fiord by laying a minefield along the flank. Fortunately, the depth of the channel is not helpful to such a plan. Nevertheless, the sooner that the route can be interrupted the better the prospect. In entering the Skagerrak our warships have not only to meet the danger of mines and submarines, but the threat of the German air force, which can now operate at short-range from bases in Danish Jutland. This may be a formidable risk, but one which the needs of the situation justify taking. Even though there may be reluctance to venture our more powerful

The Invasion of Norway

ships in those enclosed waters, there is unmistakable call to exert our strength in destroyers and submarines. Indeed, it could be wished that past naval building programmes had concentrated on producing a higher proportion of such torpedo-craft.

From the reports up to date it is clear that the audacity suggested by the situation is being finely shown by units of the Navy and the Air Force. It may now be the turn of the Army, the French as well as our own. In this case the most urgent need, as well as the most favourable opportunity at present, lies on the west coast—with the object of loosening the German footholds before they can be consolidated and reinforced, and of stiffening the Norwegian resistance to the main German forces advancing from the south.

In considering what can be done, we have to face the difficulty that the Germans have forestalled us by occupying the ports which form the strategic key-points along that coast. Yet the troops which they have sent there by sea can hardly be sufficient to do much more than occupy these points—until the main forces advancing overland can push past the Norwegian opposition and reinforce them.

As the situation presents itself, the extent and nature of the Norwegian coastline would seem to offer scope for a subtly conceived strategic offensive on the part of the Allied forces, applying the basic idea of infiltration tactics on a new and wider pattern, adapted to the particular conditions. By landing at a number of points in the various fiords flanking the ports which the Germans have seized, the Allied troops might get behind them and cut them off from potential reinforcement and supply. The more numerous the points of landing, provided that these were carefully chosen, the more prospect there would be of finding unguarded or weakly held routes to the enemy's rear. Also, the more widely such landings were spread, the more they should tend to deceive and confuse the enemy—and create a paralysing "strategic smoke-screen" favourable to the

The Current of War

Allies' further advance. Such a method would also promise the most widespread encouragement to the Norwegian forces and people. And the more the Germans may be led to anticipate a counter-offensive of this wide-fronted kind, the better for the Allies' purpose—since the mere anticipation may induce the occupying forces to disperse and dissipate their strength.

As a start, small advance detachments might be landed at the earliest possible moment, as they could prove valuable not only in harassing the enemy, but in giving the Norwegians a visible assurance that help was on the way. They might well apply guerrilla tactics, pending the arrival of larger reinforcements.

One great asset that such forces will enjoy is that they will be operating amongst a friendly population. This would, in particular, diminish the risk that small parties would otherwise run. Another great asset is the Allies' domination of the sea, which would minimize the risk of landing, and maintaining, forces at a number of points over a wide frontage. There is often more safety in apparent audacity than in excessive caution and concentration. In this case the circumstances make it exceptionally safe, as well as the most promising course.

It would be wise, however, to ensure as far as possible that the troops employed are suited to the type of operations required of them, and to the kind of country in which they will have to operate. The French *Chasseurs Alpins* are, obviously, the most suitable that the Allies could find, while in the British Army any officers and men who have had recent practice in mountain warfare overseas might be utilized as far as available—so long as no time is lost. It is even more important to pick suitable commanders. And here natural initiative and audacity might count for more than experience of the North-West Frontier, where caution is a prime requirement. The commanders should correspond to a Wolfe of Quebec rather than to a Stopford or Sitwell of Suvla.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ALLIED COUNTER-INVASION

On April 11 Mr. Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, made a long statement on the naval operations up to date. He told the House of Commons that on the night of the 7th our air reconnaissance sent word that German naval forces were out at sea and moving swiftly northwards. Our battle fleet had immediately sailed from Scapa to meet them. At the same time, and independently of this, a strong British naval force was approaching Narvik, for the purpose of laying minefields there. Thus on the morning of the 8th it looked as though the Germans would be caught between our two forces ; they had, however, got away. On the following day the fleet was cruising to the southward about the level of Bergen when it was subjected to a strong attack from German aircraft. One of our destroyers had been sunk and two cruisers slightly damaged ; a very heavy bomb had hit the flagship, the *Rodney*, but her deck armour had withstood the impact. That same morning the battle-cruiser *Renown*, of the northern force, had sighted off Narvik the 25,000-ton German battle-cruiser *Scharnhorst*, and the 10,000-ton cruiser *Hipper*, and succeeded in hitting the former at long range before it escaped under cover of a smoke-screen and of snowstorms. On the 10th machines of the Royal Air Force had bombed two German light cruisers in Bergen Fjord ; at dusk the Fleet Air Arm, flying from the Orkneys, had found only one German cruiser there, which they had bombed, and appeared to have sunk.

Mr. Churchill then went on to say : " In my view, which is shared by my skilled advisers, Herr Hitler has committed a grave strategic error in spreading the war so far to the north, and enforcing the Scandinavian people or peoples out of their attitude of neutrality. We have suffered from nothing in our blockade policy so much as the denial of the Norwegian coast and cursed corridor, now closed for ever. . . . But we shall take all we want off this Norwegian coast now, with an

The Current of War

enormous increase in the facility and in the efficiency of our blockade. . . . In the upshot, it is the considered view of the Admiralty that we have greatly gained by what has occurred in Scandinavia and in northern waters in a strategic and military sense. . . . He has made a whole series of commitments upon the Norwegian coast for which he will now have to fight, if necessary, during the whole summer, against powers possessing vastly superior naval forces and able to transport them to the scene of action more easily than he can. I cannot see any counter-advantage which he has gained. . . . Grieved as we all are at the suffering and misery which are now extended to wider areas, I must declare to the House that I feel we are greatly advantaged by what has occurred, providing we act with unceasing and increasing vigour to turn to the utmost profit the strategic blunder into which our mortal enemy has been provoked."

Air and sea operations continued during the next few days. On the 13th the battleship *Warspite* with a strong force of destroyers advanced up the Narvik Fjord, and they there sank seven German destroyers. On the 14th a joint Admiralty and War Office communiqué briefly announced that "British forces have now landed at several points in Norway."

"KEEP THEM GUESSING"

(April 15)

DURING this afternoon, just within a week of the Germans' surprise attack on Norway, came the keenly awaited news that British troops had landed there to help in repelling the invaders. No statement was given in the first communiqué as to when, where, and how the landings were made—beyond the bare, if significant, fact that they were "at several points." It is naturally wise at this stage to leave the Germans the task of discovering the localities for themselves. Indeed, when the places come to be announced in subsequent communiqués, it will not necessarily mean that those mentioned include all the places where troops, in large or small quantity, have been disembarked.

For it is desirable to maintain a state of uncertainty and

The Allied Counter-Invasion

wear a cloak of obscurity as long as possible—not only to hinder the enemy's nearest forces in meeting the troops we have disembarked, and as a safeguard against air attack, but in order to confuse the enemy's general strategy in that theatre. There is nothing more important in war than to play on the mind of the opposing commander—which should be the primary aim of a true strategist. If the Germans gained a start by their surprise invasion, they provided us thereby with an opportunity to keep them on the jump in respect of our counter-moves.

Previous to yesterday's news of our landing, the most striking flash, alike in strategic and psychological effect, was Saturday's British naval exploit in Narvik Bay. From the first Admiralty report alone it would appear to have been locally decisive—to such a complete extent as to ensure the dislodgment of the Germans from this highly important area. Moreover, the destruction in this one action of seven of Germany's larger destroyers, in addition to several lost or damaged in engagements elsewhere, is likely to have a wider repercussion on her general strategic position.

If the success was achieved by a concentration of superior force at that point, made possible by our predominant sea-power, the overwhelming weight of the *Warspite's* armament should not obscure the element of audacity shown in the decision to venture a battleship in such narrow waters.

That decision may have been based on the calculation that no counter-concentration of hostile bombers was to be expected there. But the way that the *Rodney* withstood the heavy bomb which fell on her deck when off Bergen—the first hit that has been made on a capital ship—has provided a test of experience that may encourage further ventures, and a greater relaxation of past caution, in circumstances where the situation justifies the hazard. For the strategic value of any such stroke, and its benefit to the whole outlook, has always to be weighed against the tactical risk—when it is no more than a risk.

The Current of War

Even more significant than the success of our Narvik coup, if less obvious, is the indirect light on the situation that comes from German as well as Norwegian evidence as to the distinctly slow progress of the invaders in extending their footholds in the south. It would seem that they have not yet established any wide or strong grip on the country round Trondheim or Bergen. This suggests that the forces landed at these places were comparatively small. Even in the southern zone, around Oslo, the rate at which the Germans have advanced and expanded their front does not seem fast when viewed in relation to the limited scale of the defending forces and the way these were taken by surprise.

Nearly a week after the invasion opened the German forces appear to be no further forward and northward, on the road to Trondheim, than their advance parties penetrated on the first day. Indeed, reports suggest that they have been forced to withdraw some distance from the points first reached. Moreover, they have only now occupied the towns south of Oslo which lie on either side of the entrance to the Oslo fiord, a somewhat delayed precaution.

The efforts directed in this southerly direction may be inspired by anxiety about a British naval threat to the German base and communications. In conjunction with the delay in their advance northwards it may imply that the Germans, disconcerted by the way that the Norwegians have rallied to resist them, and faced with the prospect of strong British forces arriving to reinforce the resistance, have deemed it wise to modify their more far-reaching plans for the occupation of Norway and subordinate these to the immediate aim of making their position in southern Norway more secure—while time allows. In any case, the nature of the operations suggests that the invading forces are not nearly as large as some reports originally suggested.

Such indications favour Norway's prospects of checking the spread of the invading tide, and strengthen the hope that with Allied assistance she may be able to keep the

The Allied Counter-Invasion

Germans confined to the southern strip of the country while their isolated detachments along the west coast are surrounded and forced to surrender. If this were achieved it would be a great saving gain, and a severe counter-blow to Germany's prestige, even though Norway's defenders would still have to deal with the bigger problem of ejecting the invader from the main lodgment which he obtained by his sudden aggression.

There is no need as yet to discuss that problem. Before it can come to the fore there is a likelihood of fresh and far-reaching developments, which may well affect the solution. But at least it serves to emphasize the point of more immediate exigencies as to the value, and crucial importance, of timely action. If ever there was a case where rapidity becomes more important than thoroughness of preparation, and audacity matters more than caution, the present situation in Norway, and outside, provides it. Every thousand reinforcements arriving in Norway now may count for more than each ten thousand sent later. And the risk of any particular detachment being cut off in a rapid advance inland can be far outweighed by the prospective effect of gaining various key-positions while they are vacant, and denying them to the enemy. Such risks will be diminished as much as the need is increased by the fact that our forces will be operating in a friendly country, and in support of its own forces.

Similar considerations apply to our action in the naval sphere. Here the most important line of all, both for the immediate and the ultimate prospect, is that directed towards the interruption of the passage of German troopships and supply ships through the Skagerrak to the southern ports of Norway. Happily, reports up to date would seem to show that the passage is already being made hazardous and often costly. The more nearly it can be closed, the better and the quicker the prospect of the strangulation of the invasion.

If such success at sea may, unhappily, increase the risk

The Current of War

of a German attempt to force an alternative passage by land through Sweden, the latter country has at least been vouchsafed time to extend her defensive preparations—while, in present circumstances, she may well count such a risk as a lesser and more remediable evil than the now inevitable isolation and domination by Germany which would follow from the German conquest of Norway, if this were to be achieved. The losses which Germany's sea-strength has already suffered in the attempt to conquer Norway should be an encouragement to the Swedes as well as a possible deterrent to an extension of Germany's bid to subjugate Scandinavia. No statesman who was in the line of Bismarck, nor strategist who was heir to the first Moltke's wisdom, would lightly embark on such an incalculable gamble. Its very first result would be the forfeiture by Germany of Sweden's iron-ore supplies.

My chief aim in this article was again to emphasize the opportunity that was offered by the Germans' comparative slowness of advance since the first day, and by the indications that for the moment their forces, especially on the west coast, were smaller than many of the reports asserted. It seemed to me that the crucial importance of early action, coupled with the encouraging evidence of the *Rodney's* experience, was sufficient to justify taking the risk of sending our heavier ships into the Trondheim Fjord, and into the Kattegat. I felt growing anxiety at the indications that we were going to rely purely on submarine interference with the German communications in these southern waters. For it was hard to see how we could ever eject the invader from Norway unless the passage of reinforcements thither was interrupted. On the other hand, one could see that the diversion of large forces to Norway to combat the Germans' hold there, once it was established, would play into their hands by reducing the Allies' precariously narrow margin of safety on the Western Front.

How high expectations were raised by the news of the British landings can be realized by reading some of the newspaper comments on April 16 :

" Britain's land force in Norway is a very big one, armed with every kind of weapon."

The Allied Counter-Invasion

"Although it may take some weeks to achieve, the Allied chiefs are completely confident of a shattering victory in Scandinavia, which must have an important effect on the course of the war."

"The Germans' strategy is now based on the security of Oslo and their lines of communication with Germany. It is possible that they have now recognized that their troops on the west coast must be sacrificed."

No further official information, however, had been published by the time I wrote the following article on April 18. Nor had I any private knowledge of the intended landing points other than Narvik.

[Actually the force was only one Territorial infantry division (the 49th), of which only one brigade had yet landed, in the Narvik area. Another of its brigades began to disembark at Namsos, 80 miles north of Trondheim, on April 16—and was followed a few days later by a French demi-brigade of the *Chasseurs Alpins*. On April 18 the third brigade began to land at Aandalsnes, 90 miles south of Trondheim, where it was followed by a regular brigade.]

"TIME IS RUNNING SHORT"

(April 18)

The fog of war still lies thickly over Norway. Only at a few places has it lifted to any appreciable extent. As regards the landing of British troops, nothing more has yet been issued to supplement the ten-word communiqué, the quintessence of brevity, which the Admiralty and the War Office jointly published on Monday. Only from German sources have we been told that the British landings have been made on the island of Hinnøy, the largest of the Lofoten group of islands which lie across the sea-approach to Narvik. This report may mean either that the Germans have not yet spotted any other landings or that the British are, in the first place, concentrating their efforts on securing that far northerly port, which has been the North Sea shipment point of the iron-ore traffic from Sweden. Any overseas expedition of a considerable size needs to establish an

The Current of War

advanced base close to the scene of operations ; if it is not assured of such on the mainland, an adjacent island is the natural site for it. In the Dardanelles campaign, for example, we established our advanced base at Mudros on the island of Lemnos, some sixty miles from the coast of Gallipoli. Harstad on the island of Hinnöy is about the same distance from Narvik by water, but close to other points on the mainland whence roads, of a rough kind, lead towards the northern flank of the railway from Narvik to the Swedish iron-fields. If the mountainous nature of the country and the paucity of communications do not offer scope for large-scale operations, the scale of the enemy forces there hardly calls for them, while the Lofoten islands may be a convenient assembly point until the Narvik area is cleared.

In the main southern part of Norway, there are signs that the German invaders are now extending as well as consolidating their hold. From Trondheim, where the original slender occupying force appears to have been reinforced by air, they are stated to have pushed east and reached the Swedish frontier near the railway station of Storlien, some sixty miles inland, while another detachment is reported to be pushing north towards the hitherto unoccupied port of Namsos. Thereby they probably hope to establish a strategic barricade shutting off the northern part of Norway, which, in any case, they could hardly have hoped to hold unless the Norwegian people had capitulated as a whole before the Allies could come to the rescue.

From Trondheim southwards the Norwegian forces still preserve a considerable part of their territory, but while this is large in area it contains only a few small towns and is sparse in resources. Thus the chances of prolonged resistance are severely handicapped, unless speedy relief could be brought by the recapture of Trondheim and the opening of the ports to the south of it—no easy task to attempt. It would be still more difficult, however, once the invaders have spread their tentacles over the whole coastline and

The Allied Counter-Invasion

interior, and gained a firm grip on the connecting road system.

While the rugged and barren nature of the country is an obstacle to the arrival of relieving forces, it has at least the compensation of hampering the progress of the German forces and limiting the numbers they can effectively employ at any particular spot. And there are many points in such a country where a comparative handful of defenders could bar the road and keep it closed so long as their ammunition, supplies, and morale hold out. Thus the attacker might find it hard to advance except through applying a sustained air or artillery bombardment at each successive point of resistance. Where he succeeds in doing that, defending troops who are familiar with the terrain may still be able to check his progress by harassing his flanks from the high ground bordering the route.

It is foolish, however, to underrate the great strategic advantage which the German invaders gained, by surprise, in seizing at the very outset all the chief ports and many of the local mobilization centres of the Norwegian Army. It was the means of multiplying the limited numbers which they originally landed, by a heavy subtraction from the nominal strength of the Norwegian forces, as these might have been mobilized had they not been taken unawares. That advantage has since been extended by the way they have got astride all the four railways and most of the main roads into Sweden. It would appear that their primary aim has been to widen their front in the south before penetrating deep into the country. From their base at the head of the Oslo Fjord they have pushed out two horns, one eastward along the Stockholm line to Kongsvinger and the Swedish frontier station, the other westward to Kongsberg, on the road for Bergen.

Little light has come as to what has been happening along the south coast, the most populated tract of Norway—although, even here, the proportion of inhabitants to the square mile is less than that of the least populated English

The Current of War

county, Westmorland. How far the Germans have extended their original lodgments at Kristiansand, Egersund, and Stavanger is uncertain, and no news has come as to whether the Norwegians in this part were able to organize any resistance. But it must be doubtful whether any considerable number of men from the occupied areas here have been able to join the forces which are trying to hold in check the main German advance from Oslo.

The extreme sparseness of the population along the backbone of Norway from Hamar to Narvik suggests that few reserves can have been drawn from the interior to reinforce either the hurriedly collected troops who have been gallantly fighting to stem the German advance northward from Oslo, or those who have been striving to hold in check the German detachment at Trondheim. This may help to account for the reported fact that the German troops from Trondheim have been able not only to push out eastward to the Swedish frontier and northward to Namsos, but southward to Roros, one of the few remaining gateways into Sweden.

It thus looks as if time is running short. Unless early relief can be brought to the scattered forces defending the centre of the country, it can hardly be assumed that they will be able to maintain their resistance. Any such relief was almost bound to depend on finding or forcing routes of entry in the Trondheim zone, and there are ominous indications that the invaders have been able to strengthen themselves and their position there. If relief cannot be given owing to the difficulties of approach, it would seem probable that the Norwegian forces would be gradually driven off the main arteries of internal communication, even though undaunted parties might keep up a guerrilla campaign in the mountains.

This would mean that the Germans could complete the occupation of the main part of Norway. On the other hand, we might count on preserving the long northern strip of the country once Narvik has been cleared of the

The Allied Counter-Invasion

invaders, who are isolated from all possibility of relief. If such a partial redemption of Norway's territory would be far from satisfying, even as a temporary measure, it would at least recover the rail route to the Swedish iron-fields. It is to be hoped that the invaders have not been able to damage it badly. The reopening of that route would do more than curtail Germany's prospects of obtaining adequate iron-ore supplies. For it should be an assurance to Sweden against the danger of a German invasion, and a corresponding deterrent to this development—since any German attempt to invade the south of Sweden would automatically bring British troops, from the north, to Sweden's help. Through Narvik they could not only assist in covering the iron-fields, close at hand, but be able to reinforce the main Swedish defence.

That night another brief communiqué announced : "Landing of British troops in Norway continues. Contact has been made with Norwegian forces and operations are proceeding." Swedish reports stated that a landing had been made at Namsos. They also indicated that the German force at Trondheim was only some 2000 strong, and at Narvik hardly more. But the real nature of the difficulties ahead was obscured by the way that even the most sober of British papers described the Germans' claim to have control of the air over Norway as "window-dressing by Berlin."

Next day I wrote a broad estimate of the situation for *Life*, the American weekly.

"THE PROSPECT IN NORWAY"

(April 19)

While much of the situation in Norway is still hazy, the outline of the German plan of invasion is clear. So is its purpose. The German command chose to play for the highest stakes rather than for what they could safely afford to venture. By that daring gamble, however, it would seem that they hoped not only for larger gain, but for greater security.

The Current of War

A more cautious strategy would have confined their primary stroke to a landing at Oslo and on the south coast of Norway. In this, the expedition would have kept within the comparatively sheltered waters of the Skagerrak, while the whole strength in destroyers could have been employed to protect the passage against British submarine attack. Subsequently, their fleet might have moved westward into the open sea to lie in wait for the British troop convoys that might be anticipated, and harass these as far as possible without endangering their own getaway.

By such a partial aim the Germans might safely have counted on occupying the whole of the south of Norway, as far west as Stavanger—the best available air base. They might even have been able to push through the mountains before the dazed Norwegians could improvise an adequate defence, and reach Trondheim and Bergen overland. But it had to be reckoned rather more probable that the Norwegians would be able to delay their advance, especially along the high mountain route to Bergen, until British reinforcements arrived to help in preserving these important ports. This would have left the Germans in possession of the south of Norway, while the Allies held the west and north. While neither side would have found it easy to overcome the other—because the difficulties of the country intensify the inherent superiority of the defence in modern warfare—Britain's command of the sea would have been a reasonable assurance that the Norwegian and Allied troops could not be forced back farther, while offering at least a possibility that the German occupiers of southern Norway would be compelled to give up their illicit tenancy through shortage of military supplies.

By attempting the bigger stroke of seizing Norway's western and southern ports simultaneously, as they actually decided to do, the Germans had a fair chance of gaining complete possession of Norway before the Allies could make any reply. For the shock of the news that all the country's

The Allied Counter-Invasion

strategic key-points had been occupied at the outset might have demoralized opposition and induced the Norwegian Government to surrender immediately, enabling the Germans to spread over the country, and establish a firm defence against the risk of an Allied counter-invasion, without fear for their communications. Even if the Norwegian Government did not capitulate—as proved to be the case—the audaciously complete plan which the Germans adopted was the best means of blocking a British move to Norway's relief. For so long as the main west coast ports were occupied, the Norwegian troops in the interior would be cut off, and an Allied landing in force might be hindered and delayed until the Norwegian resistance had collapsed.

Against these potential advantages, however, the Germans had to set two heavy risks—first, that the troopships dispatched up the west coast might be intercepted and sunk on the way ; second, that the warships used to protect the move and safeguard the occupation might be sacrificed in the fulfilment of that mission.

The first of these risks was avoided with a remarkable degree of success. The sea is a bigger place than it appears on the map, and is apt to be obscured by a climatic cloak that is not apparent there. Moreover, the chain of rocky islands which stretches along Norway's coast affords natural cover for a move which is seeking to escape detection. No zone of operations could be more convenient for any force seeking surprise and unhindered by scruples.

The second risk, however, matured. And the German Navy has had to pay a heavy price for the opening success which it enabled the German Army to achieve.

Nevertheless, it has to be recognized that the boldness of the German plan has been repaid by the gain of important advantages so far as the immediate object is concerned. Once the west coast ports were occupied it was obvious that the Norwegians' capacity for sustained resistance was gravely endangered. It spelt the dislocation of their

The Current of War

mobilization, thus multiplying the effective strength of the invading army by division of, and subtraction from, the forces which the defenders could succeed in assembling inland. It was all the worse because the rugged and barren interior of the country contains only a few small towns, so that the Norwegians cannot reckon on obtaining either the reserves or resources required for a prolonged struggle.

Geography specially favoured the invaders' daring plan, since the very strokes which put them in possession of Norway's chief ports placed them within reach of all the railway connections with Sweden, thus enabling them to isolate the Norwegian forces all the more completely.

If relief was to come while they were still holding out, it was clear that it must be quick. Time was the crucial factor. Swiftmess mattered more than strength. A few hundred extra men may enable a key-position to be retained, whereas thousands may not avail to regain it later. It is wiser to take risks in precipitate and wide-flung action, without waiting to amass reserves and complete elaborate preparations, than in deliberate assault on strongly fortified positions. The first is justifiable when time is vital, while the second may be merely suicidal.

If ever there has been a case where audacity is required, to counter and retrieve the effects of the invaders' initial audacity, the Norwegian campaign provides it. Time is already slipping away. While it is a notable achievement to have prepared and transported across the sea the first instalment of a British expeditionary force within a week of the German coup, the prospect would have been better if such a force had been held ready to embark before the Allies manifested their intention of tightening the North Sea blockade. The omission has inevitably handicapped the chances of preserving the bulk of Norway from the German grip.

Those chances must largely depend on whether the British can find or force an entry in the Trondheim region

The Allied Counter-Invasion

through which they can bring relief to the scattered Norwegian forces in the centre of the country. Unless this can be done in time the Germans may consolidate their occupation behind a strategic barrier established across the neck of land between Trondheim and the Swedish frontier. While the British recapture of Narvik will save the northern part of Norway, and may have a wider effect indirectly on the general outlook of the war, it cannot be expected to exert a direct influence on the main campaign in Norway.

The future will turn on what happens in the next week or so. No reasonable calculation of the Allies' ability to drive the Germans out of Norway as a whole can be made until it is seen whether the local situation in the Trondheim zone can be retrieved, and that route of entry for relieving forces reopened. One basic factor which is clear is that the cramped mountain valley routes of advance limit the size of the forces that could be effectively used. For this reason, the chances of loosening the invaders' hold are likely to be determined by the extent to which the Allied navies can curtail the further passage of German reinforcements and munition supplies through the Skagerrak, to Oslo.

The more success they have in blocking that passage, the more risk that Germany may attempt to force an alternative land passage through Sweden. On the other hand, by that step Germany would automatically forfeit the Swedish iron-ore supplies—until and unless she conquered the whole country. The British recapture of Narvik may be a further check on that development, especially if the German detachment there is overcome before it destroys the railway into Sweden. For by that route Allied troops could be poured into the north of Sweden, not only to make the iron fields secure but to assist in the defence of southern Sweden. Moreover, the assurance that the way had been opened for such aid would immediately allow Sweden to release reserves from her northern frontier to strengthen her concentration against invasion in the south.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN AWKWARD BALANCE

On the night of April 20, a War Office communiqué stated : "Operations in Norway are proceeding according to plan. French troops have landed in Norway, and on April 19 Allied forces occupied certain points of vantage."

Stockholm reports put the total force landed as two British divisions and one French division—"about 50,000 men." This was a considerable over-estimate. At the same time news was received that the Norwegians had been driven out of Hamar and Elverum, each some 70 miles north of Oslo, on the two roads to Trondheim.

The following night a fourth communiqué stated : "Operations in Norway are continuing. British troops are operating in conjunction with Norwegian forces." A further communiqué indirectly conveyed that Namsos had been our landing-place by saying while the Germans had dropped many bombs there on the 20th, and done extensive damage to the town, the only Allied loss was one British trawler sunk and that "there were no casualties to Allied troops." It was also revealed that the Allied forces at Namsos were under Major-General A. Carton de Wiart, V.C., who had retired from the Army in 1923 after a very gallant record in the last war.

On the night of the 22nd another communiqué said that our troops, landing at "many places" had achieved "considerable success in the face of great difficulties."

Press reports from Stockholm published on the 23rd stated that on the night of the 19th an initial detachment of British troops had reinforced the Norwegians at Lillehammer—40 miles north of Hamar, and 110 miles north of Oslo—after landing at Aandsnes. [The forces in this area, south of Trondheim, were under Major-General B. C. T. Paget, who had been Commandant of the Staff College before the war.]

That day I wrote as follows :

An Awkward Balance

“SAVING TIME”

(April 23)

WHILE authentic news of the campaign in Norway is still meagre, and official communiqués continue to preserve extreme reticence, some of the facts that have emerged carry an unmistakable significance. Because of the difficulties which the country offers, and the problems that have to be surmounted, it may be wise to avoid raising premature anticipations, as well as to keep the enemy mystified. But the general impression conveyed by the salient points is an encouraging one.

It would seem from the bare indications hitherto given that the pattern of the British counter-offensive operations has fulfilled both in principle and in method the hopes expressed in my article of April 12, “A Chance for Audacity,” viz. a wide-front application of infiltration tactics by landings made at numerous points, first with small parties and then in increasing strength according to the circumstances discovered by the preliminary explorations. To any student of war who measured the difficulties, and took account of the inherent delays, the situation in the middle of this week must look markedly better than might have been expected in the middle of last week. Progress has exceeded, rather than fallen below, what could then be safely counted upon.

It is, for example, less important for the general prospect that Narvik has not yet been completely regained than that the Norwegian forces in the centre of southern Norway remain in being, and are still blocking the main German advance northward from Oslo to the support of the German detachment at Trondheim. For it means that the Norwegians have maintained the prospect of retaining the upper half of southern Norway, instead of the Allies being left to face the far more difficult task of regaining it for them.

There is further ground for encouragement in the reports

The Current of War

that Allied troops have succeeded in reinforcing the Norwegian resistance not only north of Trondheim, but at Lillehammer in the Gudbrand Valley on the railway from Oslo to Trondheim. According to Swedish accounts the first British contingent of 750 men reached Lillehammer on Friday night last, after landing at the apparently unoccupied port of Aandalsnes and being railed up the line through Dombaas, the junction with the main Oslo-Trondheim railway. Small as that first contingent may sound, such a reinforcement of well-equipped men arriving in the nick of time may well have counted, both morally and materially, for much more than its reported numbers imply. And it is to be hoped that the size of the reinforcement may have been considerably augmented during the succeeding days.

According to one account, part of the later arrivals at Aandalsnes have been despatched northward from Dombaas to operate against Trondheim from the rear. It is even stated that this force has already established itself at Stoeren, where the two railways from the south join to form one line for the last twenty-five miles into Trondheim. While all such reports must be regarded with reserve until definitely confirmed, such a move is strategically natural if the means have become available.

Other reports have spoken of an Allied landing at Laerdal far up the Sognefiord, which penetrates farthest inland of all the fiords—over a hundred miles, even as the crow flies. From Laerdal there is a road running down the Valdres Valley towards Gjøvik and Lake Mjøsa, by which the flank of the German advance on Lillehammer might be threatened.

On Sunday a report came from the Norwegian Legation in Stockholm that British troops, supported by Norwegians, had pressed south from Lillehammer and retaken Hamar and Elverum. This has not been confirmed—and seemed optimistic, in all the circumstances. In view of the Germans'

An Awkward Balance

advantage for rapid reinforcement, from Oslo, of their advanced forces, it is more reasonable to hope that early Allied reinforcements may have enabled the slender and inevitably-tired Norwegian force to hold their ground, than to expect them to regain ground that has already been lost. On the other hand, the cramped mountain-valleys offer so many good positions for resistance, and set such definite limits to the number of troops who can be effectively deployed, that a progressive trickle of fresh reinforcements may greatly improve the prospects of sustained defence long before it develops into a considerable volume of force.

So long as the route up the Gudbrand Valley can be barred to the invader, there is a good chance of keeping open an Allied side-door into the centre of Norway, and of pinching out the German occupiers of the main Trondheim gateway while they are still isolated from the mass of the invading forces. In this fact lies the significance of the report that the German troops from Elverum, on the route parallel to that through Hamar and Lillhammer, have advanced some twenty-five miles, as far as Rena and Amot. It suggests that the Germans, anticipating that they may be blocked along the line through the Gudbrand Valley, are intent to lose no time in trying to open up an alternative line of advance to Trondheim—up the Glomma River, through the Oster Valley. But this, likewise, is not an easy route—much easier, indeed, to defend than to penetrate. Moreover, even if Allied troops have not succeeded in occupying its terminal point at Stoeren junction, and thereby securing a means of reinforcing the defenders by rail, there are at least two connecting roads by which troops arriving in the Dombas area might cross over to support the resistance in the Oster Valley.

The potential strategic importance of any Allied disembarkation at Aandsnes or other places south of Trondheim is considerably greater than that of the other reported landings north of Trondheim, at or near Namsos. While the

The Current of War

two are complementary in aim, the movement north of Trondheim corresponds to customary ideas of security in the offensive—or would do so, if it alone had been initiated—whereas the operations south of Trondheim represent audacity. The former are inevitably limited to a more or less frontal advance on the enemy, which might hardly have a quick effect unless aided by independent leverage on the enemy's rear. The latter operations drive a wedge between the invaders' main body in the Oslo area and their principal detachments—those detachments by which they presumably hoped to compass the downfall of Norway and the frustration of her Allies at a single, if several-pronged, stroke.

The chief risk which these Allied landings may run is that which comes from German air attack on the approach of troopships through, and the process of disembarkation in, the narrow and precipitous fiords ; also, in the subsequent move inland through equally narrow mountain-valleys. That risk is not a light one, until the Allies can establish air-bases in Norway from which they can counter the invader's bombers and gain air superiority in the zone of operations. But the method of multiple landings over a wide front, combined with the skilful use of darkness to cover the more dangerous periods, offers the best way of minimizing the risk. And the circumstances of the campaign, in any case, call for audacity if time is to be saved—since saving time is the essence of the problem of preserving Norway.

[In the light of the facts it will be seen that the official communiqué was somewhat misleading, perhaps of design, in its reference to landings at "many" places, and that in consequence I was over-optimistic as to the extent of the distractions which were being developed to the enemy's power of concentration. Furthermore, it would not appear that there was any attempt to use picked forces of a guerrilla type in advance of the landing of ordinary bodies of troops. These were composed of Territorials from the industrial North and

An Awkward Balance

Midlands—who, however brave, could hardly be considered suitable for the difficult mountain conditions which faced them in their first experience of fighting. It is remarkable that they came through it as well as they did.]

An official communiqué on the night of the 23rd stated : “ North of Trondheim our troops have counter-attacked and a sharp engagement has ensued.” Unofficial reports said that our troops advancing south from Namsos had met with a reverse at Steinkjer, on the road to Trondheim. A further communiqué the next night stated : “ In the Trondheim area, the counter-attack which was referred to in yesterday’s communiqué was delivered by a considerable number of German troops landed from ships in the Trondheim Fjord. After some sharp fighting, our troops succeeded in re-establishing the situation.” This was slightly amplified by unofficial reports on the 25th, when I wrote the article which follows. To anyone versed in reading official communiqués it was clear that the phrase “ succeeded in re-establishing ” meant that our troops had not regained the ground they had lost, but had fallen back to a position in rear. This was rather disquieting, as the map showed that there was little room to withdraw without the British and Norwegian forces becoming separated by the Snasavatn lake, and having to cover divergent lines of operation.

“ A WAR OF MANŒUVRE ”

(April 25)

In the continued absence of any specific reports of the situation in Norway from official quarters we have to depend mainly on the news which filters through the correspondents of Swedish papers. If this is uncertain and sometimes contradictory, it has at least the compensation of being the one available neutral source which remains capable—although for how much longer no one can tell—of giving a more or less impartial view of the operations there. For it is one of the disadvantages of the spread of the war that it progressively seals up the channels through which the facts necessary for a considered judgment of the prospects can be obtained.

The Current of War

So far as can be gauged from the latest reports, the German forces from Oslo are now directing their efforts towards opening up the more easterly route to Trondheim, in view of the resistance which the Norwegians, reinforced by British troops, have been offering on the westerly route through the Gudbrand valley. At the same time the reports imply that the Allied advance on Trondheim from the north—by the troops disembarked at or near Namsos—has unfortunately suffered a set-back. And this would seem to have occurred at a point which is awkward, strategically and tactically, for the prospects of deployment for the desirable forward move which would place the Allies firmly astride the railway running east from Trondheim into Sweden.

In view of the reputedly slender strength of the German detachment at Trondheim, the enemy showed boldness in pushing as far north as Steinkjer, for any disaster to that portion of it which carried out this advance would imperil their whole prospect of holding the Trondheim area. On the other hand, the advance offered the chance of putting the Norwegians and their allies on the horns of a dilemma—between protecting the railway to Grong, which runs along the east shore of the Snasavatn lake, and covering the road to Grong along the west shore as well as the line of communication with the port of Namsos by road.

It would appear that the German troops who were following up the forced retirement of the Norwegians from Levanger and Verdalsöra were helped by a sudden landing of fresh troops on the flank or rear of the opposing forces. In their capacity to achieve such an amphibious manoeuvre, the Germans profited from their control of the far-stretching Trondheim Fiord, which is virtually a great inland lake safeguarded by a narrow sea-inlet. While the Allies were forced to withdraw from the heavily bombed town of Steinkjer under combined land and air pressure, they are said to have retained their hold on a strong natural position

An Awkward Balance

about six miles to the north. So long as they are not forced back farther, this should enable them to continue covering the routes both to Grong and Namsos, and thus avoid a division of their forces.

The partial measure of success secured by the German troops at Steinkjer naturally suggests that the Norwegian forces in that area must be sparse and that the Allied forces hitherto landed there are not large. This may be due to the difficulty of securing the aerodromes necessary to assure adequate air support for them, since it would be unwise to land any considerable mass of troops unless the enemy's aircraft can be driven off, and kept off, their routes of advance and supply. Only small parties, capable of operating in a guerrilla-like way, can be expected to carry on effectively while the enemy dominate the air in the zone of operations. Thanks to their advantage in the air, the Germans are said to have hampered our use of the port facilities at Namsos for landing further troops, and to have forced our warships to move farther down the fiord.

South of Trondheim, the Norwegian and Allied troops seem to have delayed, if they have not stopped, the German advance past Lillehammer, along the westerly route through the Gudbrand valley. On the more easterly railway route through the Oster valley, however, the Germans are now stated to have pressed north as far as, or beyond, Koppang, which is about 120 miles from Stoeren, where this line joins the western route to Trondheim.

A significant report speaks of a German attempt to advance along a road still farther east, up the Trysil valley, which runs close to and parallel with the Swedish frontier. One object, presumably, is to loosen the resistance of the Norwegian forces defending the Oster valley—by threatening their line of retreat into and supply from Sweden. Another likely object of this move in the extreme east is to forestall the possibility that part of the Norwegian defenders of the Oster valley might withdraw to a flank, into the mountains,

The Current of War

whence they could harass the advance on Trondheim—and might continue to interrupt traffic along that railway even if the Germans succeeded in reaching Trondheim and reopening the line. It is to be hoped that the Norwegians may continue to check this latest move.

As for the situation near Trondheim itself, it is good news that the little fort of Hegre, on the railway line to Sweden, is still holding out, and has received fresh supplies as a result of the diversion of the Germans' attention to the Steinkjer operations farther north. While this fort holds out it is likely to hamper the German movements in the area.

No further developments of significance are yet reported from Narvik, where fresh snowstorms are apparently hindering operations. The situation here may well have a close and important bearing on the outlook in Sweden and the chances of a German invasion of that country. If the German troops in the Narvik area could hold out long enough to block the railway route into northern Sweden, and the Gallivare ironfields, until a fresh German expeditionary force could attempt a landing near the Baltic port of Lulea, at present ice-bound, their chances of capturing the ironfields before the Allies could come to the rescue would be much increased. This possibility would naturally be an inducement to accept the risks of such a further campaigning venture.

On the other hand, if the Allies appear likely to clear the Narvik area and reopen the railway in the near future, that prospect may be a corresponding deterrent to an attack on Sweden. The short stretch of line from Narvik to the Swedish frontier forms the key to Sweden's reinforcement and Germany's iron-ore supply. Hence the importance of regaining it quickly, and without it being seriously damaged.

On the night of the 25th the War Office communiqué hinted at ominous new developments when it stated: "In the south, increased enemy pressure has necessitated the with-

An Awkward Balance

drawal of Allied forces from the positions they previously held near Lillehammer." Unofficial reports on the following day made it clear that German mobile forces were now making a strong drive up both the western and eastern routes to Trondheim.

"CRITICAL DAYS IN NORWAY"

(April 29)

The news from Norway, brief and bare as it is, suffices to show that a crisis in the struggle has been reached. Far more than their own security depends on whether the British forces that have already been landed can check the double German drive up the Gudbrandsdal and the Osterdal. The prospects of the campaign inevitably hinge on the possibility of preventing the main German forces from the south breaking through to Trondheim. So long as the Allies can keep these two long bottle-necks corked, they have a reasonable chance of preserving an important part of southern Norway and regaining more of it.

If the Germans can push out the corks before these are firmly sealed, they will be able to reinforce their isolated detachment in the Trondheim area, and develop their present finger-pressure into a strong grip.

The critical zone is that south of Trondheim. The focal points in it are the rail junctions of Dombaas and Stoeren, which are nearly a hundred miles apart. Both are of key-importance from the Allies' point of view, a fact which gives the Germans the strategic advantage which is always inherent in the existence of alternative objectives—enabling the attacker, in Sherman's phrase, to put his opponent on the "horns of a dilemma." For if the German force which has been pushing up the Gudbrandsdal were to break through the defences south of Dombaas and secure this junction, they would not only throw the British back on their presumable landing-place at Aandalsnes and pen them into the Romsdal—from which there are no lateral

The Current of War

roads into other valleys—but would cut off the troops which have been sent to hold Stoeren and to bar the easterly German advance up the Osterdal. Yet if Stoeren fell while Dombaas was safely held by us, the Germans would have succeeded in their object of opening the way to Trondheim, and could strengthen their forces there with a view to driving back the Allied advance from Namsos in the north.

A further complication of the Allies' difficult problem in the Dombaas-Stoeren zone is presented by the news that the Germans are trying to push forces from the Osterdal across the mountains to the west, in order to get astride the railway between Dombaas and Stoeren. Discussing the prospects of checking the German advance towards Trondheim a week ago I pointed out that, if the British troops then arriving at Dombaas did not succeed in securing Stoeren junction, and with it the use of the railway down the Osterdal, there were two intermediate roads by which they might be able to cross over to the Osterdal and reinforce the Norwegian resistance north of Elverum. In the event, Stoeren was gained, although it is not clear how far British troops were sent beyond it to aid the defenders of the Osterdal. It was the Germans, however, who in these circumstances have profited by the existence of the two lateral roads.

Having broken the Norwegian resistance near Elverum, they pushed fast up the Osterdal. Then, while the spearhead of this advance was thrust past Roros and on towards Stoeren, two off-shoots branched westwards over the mountains—one from Tynsel, along the road to Ulsberg station; the other from Alvdal along the road to Jerkinn station. The former is likely to be the stronger detachment, because of the road being better. This thrust, if it reached Ulsberg, would not only sever communication between Dombaas and Stoeren, but offer a means of striking the Allied troops at Stoeren in rear while they were being attacked in front by the main force which had gone direct

An Awkward Balance

up the Osterdal. It might also enable the Germans to reach Trondheim by short-circuiting Stocren, since just beyond Ulsberg an alternative route to Trondheim, by an easier road, runs down the Orkdal.

It can thus be seen that the Allied force which landed near Aandalsnes is now threatened by four distinct thrusts, and in order to meet these has to spread its resources over a front of more than a hundred miles. Moreover, it is a front without much depth now, since each of the German thrusts seems to have progressed far enough to leave the defenders little room for further withdrawal on any of the four routes without endangering the defence of the others. Should the thrusts all be parried and the German plan foiled at this stage, it will be a fine feat of arms. Much depends on the rate at which British reinforcements have been reaching Dombaas in the last few days. If the scale were large enough, and adequate air support became available, the widely separated German thrusts might still offer, to skilled and daring leadership, an opportunity for deadly ripostes against their forces in detail.

Meantime, the position north of Trondheim seems to be quiet, with both sides consolidating their positions near Steinkjer after the recent fighting. This is so far distant from Trondheim that even if the Allied force in that area were able to resume its advance shortly, it could hardly be expected to have an immediate effect on the situation south of Trondheim, or relieve the German pressure there. Only the forcing of a direct sea-entry into the Trondheim fiord could do that, but any such naval venture has naturally become more hazardous as the days have passed. For it is now three weeks since the Germans established themselves there.

When the first news came of the German invasion of Norway, I pointed out in my initial article that the time-factor dominated the problem of countering it—above all, because “the power which defence has gained in modern

The Current of War

warfare makes it very difficult to eject an invader who has once consolidated a foothold," so that possession tends to be "nine points of the war." For that reason, it was essential that no time should be lost in any action that we took. Indeed, it was more than a question of hastened preparations; for it could be seen on the first day that "if such steps are to have an adequate prospect, they should be already in progress."

In the succeeding article, I went on to emphasize the necessity of audacity in the direction of our counter-measures, if they were to take effect within the time when they were likely to be effective. Such audacity was demanded, by the outlook, both in action against the invaders' main communications through the Skagerrak and in a widespread series of landings on the west coast "with the object of loosening the German footholds before they can be consolidated and reinforced, and of stiffening the Norwegian resistance to the main German forces advancing from the south." Where time was so urgent the claims of security must be subordinated to it, but the two might be reconciled by landing small guerrilla-like parties at the earliest possible moment and at numerous points to explore the situation, encourage the local Norwegian troops, and confuse the enemy—before the main landings were carried out. "The opening days may be crucial for the issue."

It now seems likely that the opportunity for audacious counter-moves was even greater than it appeared; that during the first week, at least, the German invading forces were weaker, and had a more precarious hold on such areas as they had occupied, than calculation suggested. Their advance inland from their landing-places, and their spread over the country, was certainly slower than might have been expected. But the Allies were not able, unfortunately, to exploit these crucial days of offensive opportunity to the extent required by the situation. And the consequence is that our forces in Norway are now faced with critical days

An Awkward Balance

of defensive emergency. How far this development was unavoidable it is not easy to tell, and may not be clear until the history of the war comes to be written. But the outlines of the actual position are plain.

The natural anxiety which it causes is accentuated by reaction from the foolish doses of optimism to which the British public has been treated. There will be some compensation if this awakening to the realities of a very difficult problem leads to a dissipation of certain illusions which have been fostered since the start of the war.

There is, however, a questionable tendency in some of the criticism which is being voiced—and a risk of injustice. It is possible that mistakes have been made by some of the commanders on the spot—such mistakes are common in war, even where the problem is much simpler and clearer than that which has faced our commanders in Norway. But it would be a greater mistake to discourage audacity by passing harsh judgments upon local set-backs, which perhaps result from pushing on too fast—in circumstances where speed was more vital than security.

A similar reflection applies to criticisms based on the fact that our first-landed forces have suffered from a temporary lack of anti-aircraft equipment and supporting artillery. This was inevitable in a case where the time-factor was paramount. There was more to be gained—for the ultimate purpose of the expeditionary force—by a bold and swift advance to the Norwegians' aid than could be lost by disregard of normal precautions. We could have curtailed our military risks by confining our initial operations to the Narvik area, but we should have courted the greater risk of forfeiting the trust of our present and potential Allies. World opinion would have said that we were only concerned to secure the iron-ore railway, not to save Norway.

It may be that some of our advanced detachments were larger than could safely move without artillery and anti-aircraft support, and that it would have been wiser to send

The Current of War

no more than guerrilla-like parties ahead until such protection was available. It may be that the troops who were despatched were not as highly trained as the difficult conditions required ; if so, the responsibility falls on those who chose them for the task. But it should be realized that the British Army is peculiarly lacking in units specially organized and equipped for mountain warfare, so that even if the expeditionary force had been made up of Regulars they would have been handicapped in comparison with specialized mountain troops such as most of the Continental armies possess.

If there is a basic criticism that may be justified, it is one that falls higher up. Before the Government manifested a disposition to stop the German iron-ore traffic through Norwegian waters—a move that could hardly fail to provoke a reply—it should surely have seen that a carefully picked and prepared expeditionary force was held ready to embark at the shortest notice, to counter the enemy's likely riposte against Norway. It might, also, have been wise not to make such a move unless, after weighing all the risks, we were prepared to send a substantial part of our fleet into the Skagerrak to interrupt the passage of German reinforcements to Oslo. But the omission to have a strong force ready to land is at any rate the most striking answer to the German claim that their coup merely forestalled a British plan to occupy Norway.

The last point but one gained a significant emphasis from the French communiqué of April 25 : " In the Skagerrak a French destroyer flotilla attacked and sank two enemy patrol ships and returned unscathed to their base in spite of attacks from the air." Unfortunately, this venture by surface craft was not only belated, but an exception to the rule.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ALLIED WITHDRAWAL

In the next few days the news, while remaining bare, became more ominous in its implications. On April 30 the War Office stated that British troops had "made a short withdrawal to positions covering Dombaas," while the Germans claimed to have captured this place, and to have made contact near Stoeren with their forces at Trondheim. Next day the War Office briefly said: "In the Dombaas area our troops, after stubborn resistance in the face of strong enemy attacks, withdrew to prepared positions." It was obvious that once the junction at Dombaas was lost there was no point in staying at Aandsnes. On May 2 the Prime Minister announced that all the Allied forces south of Trondheim had been evacuated. Nevertheless he went on to make a remarkable statement: "I am satisfied that the balance of advantage lies up to the present with the Allied forces."

"WE MUST FACE HARD FACTS" (May 2)

IT is inevitable that yesterday's news should have wide repercussions. While the nation had been warned that our forces at Dombaas were in a difficult position, it is doubtful if they were prepared for the Prime Minister's announcement that we had re-embarked the whole of our forces from that area and abandoned the attempt to preserve the south and centre of Norway, below Trondheim, from the invader's extending grasp.

To military experts, conscious of the problems of supply and communication, the likelihood of such a forced evacuation might be implicit in the ominous news at the beginning

The Current of War

of the week, of the rapidity of the German advance last week up the Osterdal and Gudbrandsdal, coupled with the indications of the enemy's continued air superiority. But it was not easy for the general public to realize the wider significance of such portents—all the less so, since their native confidence had been nourished on a rich diet of optimistic official pronouncements. And when the critical phase came they could hardly be forewarned of its probable consequences without apprising the enemy, and thereby imperilling the process of withdrawal. Such dilemmas are constantly occurring in war, where truth is inevitably subordinated to strategic considerations.

The happiest feature of the Prime Minister's statement was his intimation that the re-embarkation of our forces had been carried out without loss, and that even in the preceding operations the casualties had not been high in proportion to the forces employed. When due account is taken of the circumstances, this would appear to be a remarkable accomplishment. And the entry on the credit side of the balance-sheet may not end there.

For the moment, it can hardly be expected that the withdrawal will be interpreted outside this country as other than a definite, if limited, defeat. We must reckon with that probability. Too many of our leaders' speeches during the war, hitherto, have been of a tenor which was not well-judged to carry conviction save to those who were anxious to be convinced. The history of war throws doubt on the wisdom of such a course. Our people have had little need of such dubious encouragement; they are at their best when they are faced with hard facts. And other peoples are more likely to be impressed by carefully measured statements that do not exceed what they are likely to find confirmed by the subsequent course of events. That is the way to win, and maintain, the advantage in the vitally important psychological sphere of war. The crows come home to roost.

The Allied Withdrawal

The extent to which the Germans secured a grip on the main ports of Norway at the outset made it plain that any British counter-moves were faced with a difficult problem. So far as the main part of Norway was concerned, any chance of an early solution depended on the utmost rapidity and audacity of action. Time was vital. And even timeliness could hardly avail unless the passage of German reinforcements through the Skagerrak could be not merely harassed but interrupted.

There was still a chance of saving the northern part of southern Norway when British forces were landed near Aandalsnes some ten days after the German invasion. But it shrank as the Germans' rather surprisingly delayed advance north from Oslo suddenly gathered pace.

The apprehension of imminent ill-tidings which arose on the 30th had its justification in something more definite than rumour and the recoil from undue optimism. For it was clear from the map that the Norwegian and British forces south of Trondheim had been deprived of all the advantage of depth, for elastic defence, which they had originally enjoyed in their parallel positions at the southern end of the Gudbrandsdal and Osterdal. They could no longer count on fighting a protracted delaying action, by successive slight withdrawals up these valleys, until the main strength of the Allied expeditionary force could be developed. Instead, both the "spring-buffers" had been driven back into their sockets, and the advancing German forces had come right up against the Allies' platform-edge.

That "platform" was represented by the hundred-mile stretch of railway between Stoeren and Dombaas. For it is the one lateral route which connects the outlets from the several possible landing-places along the coast. Dombaas junction itself covers the mouth of the valley from which our main reinforcements had to emerge as they came up, by road or rail, from their disembarkation port of Aandalsnes in the Romsdal fiord. Midway along the railway to Stoeren lies

The Current of War

the village of Opdal, where any troops who were landed in the Sunndal fiord would emerge from the road up that valley. Farther along the Stoeren line, the main road to Trondheim turns off to the west and winds down the Orkdal, throwing out side-roads to the head of some of the smaller fiords which lie outside the bottle-neck entrance to the great Trondheim fiord. Stoeren itself is the junction with the easterly railway from Oslo up the Osterdal; northward from Stoeren the railway, with a narrow road alongside it, runs directly down to Trondheim.

It is obvious that, once the German forces advancing up the Gudbrandsdal and Osterdal arrived close to Dombaas and Stoeren respectively, the Allied forces covering these two key-points had no further room for withdrawal without being cut off from each other.

The danger was increased by the fact that the German troops from the Osterdal were able to use two roads over the mountains by which they could descend on the railway at points between Dombaas and Stoeren—thus multiplying the threat of separation. These two inner lines of advance struck the railway at Ulsberg and Jerkinn, north and south of Opdal, thereby affording the Germans a chance of establishing blocks on either side of any British force that tried to come up the Sunndal, from the sea. Moreover, the advance across the more northerly of these two mountain roads enabled the Germans' Osterdal column to make touch with their hitherto isolated forces at Trondheim without first capturing Stoeren—since it was at Berkak, just beyond Ulsberg, that the main Trondheim road diverged down the Orkdal.

Thus the Germans had four spearheads pressing close against the British forces' natural assembly area—an area which, having length without depth, was virtually a line. And, as such, had a rigidity that spelt fragility. Nothing more perilously unpromising as the strategic "platform" for a campaign, especially in face of hostile air superiority, could be imagined.

The Allied Withdrawal

The way that strategic geography turned heavily in the enemy's favour, once they had reached the platform-edge, compelled an early decision as to the continuance or not of the campaign south of Trondheim. If we tried to hold on, there might still be some possibility of stemming the tide, but against it had to be weighed the probability of the destruction or capture of our forces if we did not succeed. If we were to achieve an orderly evacuation, and without heavy loss, it was advisable to begin the strategic withdrawal before it became a tactical necessity. Presumably, the difficulty of landing heavy equipment at Aandalsnes was the factor that clinched the decision—apart from the growing threat of an extension of the war to the Mediterranean.

On the night of May 3, however, the War Office announced that the Allied troops had been re-embarked at Namsos on the evening of the 2nd—a withdrawal so precipitate as to leave the Norwegians in that area in an awkward position as well as with a hopeless prospect. An announcement was made that on Tuesday, May 7, Mr. Chamberlain would make a full statement on the campaign in Parliament, when a "full dress" debate was to be held. On the previous day I wrote the following article :

"WE CUT OUR LOSSES"

(May 6)

Last Thursday the Prime Minister broke the news to the nation, which was in general but little prepared for it, that all the British forces landed south of Trondheim had been withdrawn and re-embarked. He told the House of Commons that he must defer the full story until early this week as it was "impossible to make public as yet plans and movements which are not complete." At the end of his outline of the reasons which had led to the evacuation

The Current of War

of the troops from Aandalsnes, he emphasized again that it was only an initial statement, as "certain operations are in progress, and we must do nothing which might jeopardize the lives of those engaged in them."

That veiled hint of fresh operations gave rise among the public to the idea that some fresh and bolder stroke was being carried out to retrieve the situation. It was fostered by the reports of naval bombardment at the entrance to the Trondheim fiord, as well as the continued bombardment of Stavanger, and perhaps encouraged by the impression given that the effect of our bombing of German air bases had paralysed the enemy's use of them for the time being.

But on Friday night the real nature of the further operations was made plain by a War Office communiqué which announced that the British and French troops in the Namsos area had been withdrawn to sea the previous evening. The plans and movements which "were not complete" when the Prime Minister spoke were thus revealed to comprise the complete withdrawal of the Allies from central Norway—entailing the collapse of all serious resistance to the German invaders except in the far north.

Fateful as was the decision for the people of Norway, and the prestige of the Allies, it is difficult to see how it could have been avoided except through the swift success of some alternative stroke, such as the forcing of a direct entry into the Trondheim fiord. And the chances of such a venture had obviously diminished as the time had passed without attempting it.

In default of such a "tin-opener," the Allied force at Namsos was likely to be sealed up there, while its condition was bound to deteriorate. Its situation was all the worse because the defensive position north of Steinkjer had been lost, and the Allied and Norwegian troops had been forced back on divergent lines—a fact palpable to the Germans, which had been concealed in our official communiqués.

The Allied Withdrawal

Although the British, French, and Norwegian troops in the area might for the moment constitute a force much larger than the German detachment opposing them, this was strong enough, in such difficult country, to hold the Allies in check until it could be reinforced by the main German forces pushing up from Oslo.

If the Allies had landed more troops they would only have increased the target offered the German bombers in this constricted area, and aggravated the difficulties of supply—through a wrecked port. Thus the prospect was dark. In these circumstances, it was wise to evacuate the Allied force as soon as possible, before the Germans could concentrate an overwhelming preponderance of aircraft as well as troops to jeopardize its withdrawal.

Whether it was withdrawn so precipitately and unexpectedly as to leave the local Norwegian forces in the air and leave them no chance of safe retreat—as their commander alleges—is a matter that has still to be explained. While there is no greater wisdom in war than to know when to cut one's loss, rather than persist in a hopeless venture, it may be better to risk some loss than to come away with a "clean sheet" if it can mitigate the loss otherwise suffered by a partner. It is essential to view the prospect of war as a whole, and this requires that we should view the losses of actual or potential allies as part of our own.

There are many questions which await explanation in to-morrow's debate. The very first—which is suggested by the fateful loss of time that occurred before our counter-measures developed—is whether the likelihood of a German invasion of Norway was foreseen when, weeks before, we made plain our determination to stop the Germans using Norwegian waters as a safe traffic route. If it was not foreseen, there would seem to be a strange blindness to the obvious, or else a serious deficiency in our war staff organs for visualizing and forecasting the enemy's moves. Have we any section that fulfils the elementary duty of putting itself

The Current of War

in the enemy's shoes—or their heads under his cap? If the German invasion was foreseen, it is hard to understand the delay in preparations or the dispersal of the forces originally assembled for despatch to Finland.

The next question is whether, and how far, preparations for sending an expeditionary force were accelerated when specific indications of a German move against Norway began to come in from neutral countries days before it was launched—as for example, in an article which Mr. G. L. Steer wrote on his return from Stockholm. Then there is the question whether, when the sea-movement was actually seen and reported, the possibility of it being directed against Norway's west coast ports, as well as her southern coast, was recognized. Further, in the naval operations then initiated, was the importance of interrupting the enemy's troopships realized as fully as the importance of catching their battleships?

This brings us to the question that proved crucial for the prospect of dislodging the invaders before they could consolidate their footholds—why, apparently, none of the heavier elements of the Fleet were ventured either in the Trondheim fiord or in the Skagerrak—the two keys to the strategic problem. The risk they would have run, specially from air attack, is manifest. At the same time, particular risks have always to be weighed against the potential advantages to the general situation.

It remains to be explained whether the question was carefully weighed before any decision was taken to interfere with the iron-ore traffic through Norwegian waters. Otherwise, a serious reflection is cast upon the calculations which prompted such a policy. If, on the other hand, the decision was reached in full realization that we could not afford to hazard our bigger ships in such narrow waters, it would constitute a still graver reflection on the adoption of a line of action that could hardly fail to provoke a German counter-move against Norway.

The Allied Withdrawal

In the first day's debate Mr. Chamberlain's account of the campaign was subjected to severe criticism, and the second day's debate led to the fall of his government on the 10th.

After the first day's debate I wrote the article which follows :

"LET NORWAY BE A LESSON TO US"

(May 8)

The Government spokesmen's explanation of the causes of the failure to retrieve the situation in Norway was more convincing in regard to the second act of the operations than the first. It was least satisfying about the prologue.

In so far as the Government established its case as to the difficulties which frustrated our land and sea efforts, it correspondingly cast a reflection on its own policy in the period leading up to the German invasion of Scandinavia. The better the justification for our failure to preserve Norway, the greater the condemnation of the steps, taken or threatened, which provoked German aggression against fresh victims we could not succour. What we stood to gain by blocking merely a part of Germany's iron-ore supplies was considerably less than what we could, and did, lose through inability to make an adequate riposte to Germany's obvious counter-stroke. And beyond the loss that we have suffered in prestige and strategic position, is the misery that has been brought on the hapless peoples of Norway and Denmark.

It is an object-lesson in the folly of attempting the offensive in any sphere, or talking of it, without the most careful calculation of the consequences and counters—thought out several moves ahead. The essential condition of a successful offensive is that it fits the prevailing conditions of war and the respective resources. That governing consideration would seem to have been overlooked in the policy which led to the opening up of the Scandinavian theatre, as it was certainly disregarded in many of the impulsive speeches which had previously urged us to seize the initiative—in

The Current of War

circumstances where it was unsuitable. Shall we profit by the lesson?

When we take due account of the initial advantage which the Germans were bound to enjoy in a sudden pounce on Denmark and Norway it must remain doubtful whether even the most effective counter-move on our part could have hit the invader so hard and recovered sufficient ground to deprive him of the balance of ultimate advantage—unless our naval forces were able to go into, and control, the Skagerrak. And even that bold measure might have been circumvented by air, or by opening up an alternative route through southern Sweden. The most probable outcome would have been the establishment of a military deadlock line of division across the mountainous belt of southern Norway, with the Germans holding the part along the south coast, which was richest in resources and had the most facilities for creating fresh aerodromes. Thus it has to be recognized that the eviction of the invaders and the complete recovery of Norway would have been a rather remote prospect.

None the less, it was incumbent upon our Government to do its utmost to defeat the German invasion in view of the way its policy had contributed to this development. The recovery of Narvik alone would not be regarded as a moral "clearance-certificate," even if it were an adequate military compensation—and this is now seen to be doubtful. The account given by the official spokesmen in the course of the debate did not go far enough to establish that "the utmost" was done for Norway, even taking account of the difficult circumstances with which we were faced.

The fact that our first available force was despatched to Narvik, and the admission that we knew three days before it landed there that the Norwegian forces north of Oslo were hard pressed, inevitably suggests that the minds of our responsible authorities were more occupied with that particular means of access to the Swedish iron-fields than

The Allied Withdrawal

with the wider aspects of the campaign as a whole, and the fate of Norway.

It seems strange that their awakening to the key importance of Trondheim only came as a sequel to the urgent appeals of the Norwegian Government. Even then, it is hard to understand why the contemplated attempt to force a direct entry into the Trondheim fiord was fixed for a date as late as April 25. And it was left unexplained why this attempt should have been "abandoned," as distinct from being momentarily held in abeyance, because of the hopes pinned on the promising initial success of the landings north and south of Trondheim. A good plan is one that always preserves the power of adaptability to actual developments.

Another significant point, which emerged from Lord Hankey's speech, was that on April 9 our fleet "was looking for the German fleet to give it battle." Does this imply that in their orthodox concentration against the enemy's battle-ships, our naval leaders tended to overlook the greater menace inherent in the successful passage of the bulk of the enemy's troopships? If so, it would seem that the enemy shrewdly appreciated and exploited the decoy value of his few battleships.

The Government defence was more complete in regard to the final phase of the operations. The factors which determined the withdrawal of our forces were such as to leave little room for criticism of the decision to evacuate them. Under the shadow of an enemy air superiority which could not be redressed in that area, the continuance of operations would almost inevitably have seen a rapid worsening of the position in which our troops were placed.

The maintenance of any force depends on the maintenance of its supplies, and these could not be assured so long as hostile bombers dominated the exiguous ports and constricted routes of entry. An interruption in the flow of supplies was all the more perilous because of the scantiness of local resources ; even before the Germans pushed up the

The Current of War

Gudbrandsdal and the Osterdal, the territory unoccupied by them, although fairly large in area, contained few towns and villages from which food could have been drawn to provision the defending forces. The enemy's rapid advance up the Osterdal, in conjunction with his pressure in the Gudbrandsdal, then produced a strategic situation of extreme precariousness. The order for withdrawal would seem to have been given just in time to enable our forces to slip out of a valley in which they might otherwise have been bottled without chance of effect or hope of escape.

The moral courage, or common sense, shown in making such a timely if disappointing decision deserves recognition—all the more because of its infrequency in our military history. Our military leaders have been more prone than most to indulge in gallant but disastrous gestures which did more credit to their hearts than to their heads. By contrast, the calculating decision to break off the operations south of Trondheim at the moment when they ceased to have promise is evidence of real professional judgment, as well as of an understanding of what a high command's futile "heroics" mean to the troops concerned. It is clear that our leaders have learnt at least one great lesson of the last war.

On May 28 the Allied forces in the north, which had been much increased, succeeded in occupying Narvik—the Germans retiring eastward along the railway.

On June 10 it was announced that the Allied forces had been withdrawn, and that King Haakon, together with the Norwegian Government, had been safely landed at a British port. The Norwegian forces, save for a detachment which accompanied the King, had been instructed to lay down their arms. Hostilities ceased at midnight on the 9th, thus leaving Norway entirely in German hands.

PART VI
THE STORM MOVES WEST

CHAPTER XXV

THE BREAK-IN

While the minds of the British people were largely occupied by the political crisis which followed the failure in Norway, the people of the Low Countries found growing cause for anxiety about Germany's intentions on their frontiers. In Belgium, as a result, there was great activity during the first week-end of May in blocking the roads running out of Germany. Many which had been open up till the Thursday (May 2) were made impassable with hastily felled trees. In Holland it was announced on the 7th that all military leave had been cancelled. And numerous other precautions followed, such as the closing of canal locks at nightfall and the suspension of foreign telephone services.

In the early hours of Friday, May 10, the German invasion of the Low Countries was launched by land and air—ahead of the formal demand that their Governments should acquiesce in the occupation.

“THE ATTACK OPENS”

(May 11)

THE attack in the west has begun—aimed in the first place outside the main defence front, on the extreme left flank. As expected, Holland has received the brunt of the opening blow. Belgium has also been attacked, but it has not yet become clear whether the thrust there has far-reaching objectives or is merely intended to prevent the Belgians helping their neighbours. And it remains to be seen whether a direct stroke against the main Western front will follow close upon the indirect approach to it. In other words, the question still uncertain is whether Hitler, for the moment, is playing for high or low stakes.

The Current of War

Just as his attack on Norway may have been conceived as a distraction—to draw Allied forces there, and cause them disproportionate loss in difficult efforts to regain territory which the Germans had seized by surprise—so may his attack on the Low Countries be intended as a diversionary and preparatory strategic action. Its ulterior object may be to gain advanced aerodromes from which an air campaign could be more effectively waged against this country's ports and industrial centres, and at the same time use up the British and French air forces in combating the German attack on the Low Countries. It is possible the Germans are calculating that, if an intense air struggle can be fought out in this area, they will benefit by the advantage of operating at close range from their own air bases, thus diminishing petrol consumption as well as the strain on their aircraft resources while multiplying the frequency of their possible sorties.

The prospects of their land attack are, it is obvious, also improved by choosing a theatre where reinforcement is easier for them than for the allies of the invaded countries. Much will depend on the extent to which Holland is found to have developed her defences during the past year. While the heart of the country, containing most of the chief cities and ports, has always had an inherent suitability for defence by means of inundations, the flanks have been relatively vulnerable. The north and south of Holland were regarded, until recently at any rate, as exposed areas where only delaying action was practicable—to cover the completion of the measures for defending the centre of the country. In case of attack, it was generally anticipated abroad that the Dutch forces would in a sense roll themselves up to form a strategic hedgehog. While this promised to provide a prickly obstacle to invasion, it had the potential disadvantage that the invader might quickly push deep on the southern flank, and thus separate Holland from Belgium as well as securing possible aerodromes near the coast.

The Break-In

Moreover, the concentration of defence on the centre would inevitably increase the concentration of the target offered to air attack. It remains to be seen how far the recent development of the Dutch forces and defences will enable a stout resistance on the flanks—especially the more vital southern flank.

In regard to Belgium, it can safely be said that both her defences and her forces are much stronger than they were in 1914. This became plain to me during a visit I made to that frontier in 1938. A particularly impressive feature was the elaborate scheme of demolitions, wherein every bridge—road, rail, or canal—throughout a deep belt of territory behind the frontier was prepared for blowing up, with a permanent guard on duty beside each of them. These arrangements promise a greater obstacle than the invaders met in Norway, where a territory ideal for obstruction by demolitions does not seem to have been effectively organized for the purpose.

Moreover, behind the forward zone of delaying action lies a natural defensive front formed by the broad water-lanes of the Meuse and the Albert Canal, the former being especially strong. So long as they are adequately reinforced, without loss of time, these should be hard to penetrate. The thrusting power of the German Army lies largely in its mechanized forces, and to these the Low Countries offer far less suitable going than they found in Poland.¹

In a broadcast speech that night M. Reynaud, the French Prime Minister, announced that French troops had crossed the Belgian frontier soon after 6 a.m., moving to the aid of the invaded countries. It was reported that the British Army, also, was advancing into Belgium.

At home, Mr. Neville Chamberlain's resignation was

¹ This fact, it would seem, might have suggested to the French command that the Germans would be likely to regard the Ardennes as a more suitable avenue of approach for such forces—and thus a more promising direction for their main mechanized thrust.

The Current of War

announced in the evening—and his replacement as Prime Minister by Mr. Winston Churchill.

The following night (May 11) the Dutch Commander-in-Chief, General Winkelman, issued a statement which said : " The German invasion of Holland has been a failure and the German High Command has made a profound mistake in underrating the Dutch Army. German parachute troops have absolutely failed and have either been wiped out or taken prisoner." It was reported that the Dutch had recaptured from them the aerodromes at Rotterdam and The Hague, as well as the " island " of Dordrecht, south of Rotterdam.

A considerable number of towns in France as well as in the Low Countries suffered air-raids. Also, there were many reports of parachutists being dropped.

On the 13th *The Times* report stated that " nowhere has the first line of defence of the Dutch forces been penetrated, apart from one point east of Arnhem, where a bridge had not been blown up. . . ." This, of course, was based on Dutch information.

Rather more ominous, or more honest, was the tone of reports from Belgium. The Belgian Prime Minister, in a broadcast on the night of the 12th, stated that the enemy, though checked on the first day, had succeeded on Saturday in seizing two bridges near Maastricht. His mechanized forces had then crossed these, and advanced as far as Tongres—12 miles to the north-west, and on the rear flank, of Liège. They had, however, been brought to a halt ; and in front of Liège " the enemy are unable to make any advance."

The German Army communiqué stated that, besides crossing the Albert Canal, they had captured the Belgian fort of Eben Emael between Maastricht and Liège. [This coup was achieved by a cloud of parachutists descending on top of the fort ; they planted charges of high explosive around the cupolas and thus wrecked them.] It also claimed that in northern Holland they had reached the shores of the Zuider Zee, and in the centre had pierced the line of the Ijssel.

In these very misty conditions I wrote the following article :

" THE INDIRECT ATTACK "

(May 13)

The real outlines of the struggle in the Low Countries are slow to emerge through the obscurity of the official com-

The Break-In

muniqués. These have been even vaguer than is usual in modern warfare, while the flatness of the terrain provides less help than did the mountainous configuration of Norway towards indicating the probable lines of operation.

So far as can be seen through the thick haze, the Dutch withdrawal from the essentially indefensible northern part of Holland has accorded with expectations ; the defence in the centre has not been able to hold on along the Ijssel as long as was hoped ; the defence in the south, save in Limbourg, has held rather better than might have been feared.

There is as yet no corroboration of the Germans' somewhat surprising claim that they have been able to reinforce overland the troops south of Rotterdam who were dropped from the air. If this claim should be correct, the explanation may be that, after crossing the Ijssel south-east of Arnhem, they managed to thrust mechanized forces down the long and narrow corridor between the Waal and the Lek. Such a stroke could have the effect of severing the Dutch forces which are covering the central " keep " of the country from those defending the south, and shut off Allied reinforcement. It is to be hoped that it has not succeeded.

What is unmistakably and regrettably clear is that the German forces have been able to profit by the indefensible contour of the " Maastricht appendix "—the province of Limbourg—for a swift and dangerous thrust against the flank of the Belgian defenders north of Liège. The significance of such a turning movement may be apparent to any readers who have studied the chapter on Belgian defence problems in my last year's book, *The Defence of Britain*. Briefly, the strongest natural line on which to stop an invasion of Belgium was along the strategic " moat " formed by the Meuse—from the Dutch frontier near Maastricht southward to Liège and then bending back south-westward to Namur and the French frontier. While the wooded and mountainous Ardennes, which lie south and

The Current of War

east of the Meuse, offer many obstacles to an invader, Belgium had not sufficient troops to establish a strong defensive line there, unless the French were allowed to reinforce it before any hostile attack came.

Neutrality forbade such an insurance. Thus the obvious plan of defence for Belgium was to make sure of holding the Meuse line, while attempting no more than delaying action in the Ardennes—which they could use as a spring-buffer to absorb the shock of any German advance against their southern flank, from Liège to Namur. The only part of the country beyond the Meuse which has been strongly fortified is the projecting tongue of high ground east of Liège. This twenty-five-mile stretch between the Meuse and the German frontier near Aachen was filled with several successive lines of concrete pill-boxes and large forts as well as a network of prepared demolitions. It created a much stronger barrier to invasion than existed in 1914.

From Maastricht northward, and then westward, the Belgian frontier is contiguous with the Dutch. This northern flank of Belgium's defence is much less strong by nature, but its prospect of defence has been increased in recent years by the construction of the great Albert Canal, running from Antwerp to join the Meuse at a point opposite Maastricht. At the junction the Belgians built their biggest fort, Eben Emael, deep-sunk in a cliff. While the northern flank of the Belgian defences, along the Albert Canal, was not heavily fortified, it was covered by a wide belt of country which, like that on the southern flank, allowed room for delaying action—to gain time for reinforcements to arrive.

But there is one point where no such buffer-belt exists—the bend of the Meuse opposite the Dutch frontier at Maastricht. It would seem that an unlucky delay in blowing up the bridges enabled the Germans to pierce this strategic Achilles' heel, and thrust mechanized forces deep into the country behind Liège.

If they have reached either Waremmme or Tirllemont they

The Break-In

will have cut railway communications between Brussels and Liège, while exposing the latter place to attack from the rear—the factor which precipitated its fall in 1914. How far the Belgians can continue to use the alternative route down the Meuse may also depend on the extent to which they have managed to check the German advance in the Ardennes, which approach close to the south bank of the Meuse. But even if the Belgians are forced to give up their best natural line of defence, they have still a potentially strong and shorter line from Antwerp to Namur covering Brussels, as well as further lines west of the capital.

In considering the progress of the German invasion of Holland and Belgium, it is not difficult to realize the upsetting effect of their rear attacks by parachute and other airborne troops. The indirect disturbance of the plans and counter-moves of the defending forces may well have been much wider and greater than its direct damage. For it was bound to create uncertainty and confusion in the minds of those responsible for the movement of reserves and supplies—all the more so because the actual number of parachutists will almost inevitably be much multiplied in the public imagination, and reflected in the number of reports received.¹ Thus troop trains and lorry convoys may suffer frequent delays, apart from those imposed by air attacks. Likewise, an increased number of troops will probably be diverted to deal with actual or believed landings from the air.

The introduction of parachute troops has come as a striking contribution to an attacker's power of fulfilling the principle of economy of force, since a small proportion of them may well cause a much bigger subtraction from the defender's concentration of his forces to meet the direct attack. Moreover, it may provide a new means of exerting leverage on the defender's front, since the sounds of firing in

¹ This surmise was soon confirmed, and likewise the anticipations as to its effect.

The Current of War

rear is a common cause of the abandonment of positions which might otherwise never be carried by frontal assault.

Reports from Holland that night admitted that the Germans had succeeded in breaking through the Ijssel line, and also that they had recaptured the Waalhaven aerodrome, south of Rotterdam. French motorized troops were stated to have reached Holland, but to be hard pressed there by German forces of the same kind.

The Germans claimed that they had penetrated into Liège on the 13th and occupied the citadel, although the outer forts were still resisting.

The French claimed that their tank-led counter-attacks near St. Trond—significantly, 12 miles *west* of Tongres—had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. But they admitted that the enemy had made serious progress in the Belgian Ardennes and that their own "cavalry units" in that quarter had fallen back to the Meuse.

On the 14th the French official communiqué admitted that the enemy had reached the Meuse from Liège to Namur and Sedan—and that Sedan itself had been evacuated.

The Germans said that on the Ardennes sector they had reached the French frontier practically everywhere, and that, "under the protection of ceaseless air attacks with annihilating effect," they had crossed the Meuse into France. The communiqué also stated that they had breached the main Dutch line of defence, the Grebbe line covering Utrecht.

Reports from Holland admitted that this water-line had been penetrated, and also outflanked through the enemy's capture by stealth of the Moerdijk Bridge across the Waal (the main channel by which the Rhine reaches the sea).

Queen Wilhelmina had arrived in London on the 13th, and was followed next day by the Dutch Prime Minister and other members of the Government. In comment on this development, the able diplomatic correspondent of *The Times* remarked: "As soon as possible the Queen and her Government will return to Holland." It was not clear whether he meant this hopefully or ironically.

On the evening of the 14th, General Winkelman ordered the Dutch forces to cease fire—following a shattering air attack on Rotterdam, and a threat of similar action against Utrecht.

The Break-In

“ACCORDING TO EXPECTATIONS”

(May 15)

The Dutch decision to cease fighting, however regrettable, should surprise no one who understood the basic conditions of modern warfare or the strategic outlines of Holland's defence problem. Nor should it lead to any ungenerous disparagement of the resistance which the Dutch offered.

Even if there had been no neglect to develop defences and equipment of a modern kind, geography imposed a heavy handicap on her power of resistance, making her peculiarly susceptible both to air domination and to isolation from Allied help. Her traditional strategy of folding in her flanks to form a hedgehog ring round the heart of the country, while promising prolonged resistance in the past, was unsuited to the conditions of the present day. It tended to ease the way for a mechanized thrust on the southern flank, aimed to separate her from Belgium and turn the latter country's northern flank. Worse still, it was bound to provide the enemy's overwhelmingly superior air force with a concentrated target, packed with cities and civil population. Such a menace might have been held at bay only if there had been a tremendous density of anti-aircraft guns, combined with an adequate system of deep shelter for the population—hardly possible in such a low-lying country. Failing these requirements, no prolonged stand could be expected.

The countries which form Hitler's real point of aim should be grateful to the Dutch for the short delay, and considerably more extensive damage, which their resistance caused the invading forces. It was the misfortune of the Dutch soldiers, and civilians, that, in the words of their Commander-in-Chief, “they had to face modern means of warfare against which courage is of no avail.”

If the news of Holland's fall has come as a shock to our people, the direct fault lies with those in power who believe

The Current of War

in sheltering public morale from contact with uncomfortable reality. To anyone who has seriously studied the history of war, and the record of our people in war, that policy seemed a fundamentally mistaken one—bound to bring retribution. The crows are still coming home to roost.

But in a sober view of the situation there is no more cause for dismay than there was a week ago. Thanks to the quality and magnificent spirit of our air force in face of superior numbers, the enemy's progress towards his probable purpose of exhausting our aircraft resources by sheer intensity of action has been less than he might reasonably have anticipated, while it would seem to have been purchased at a disproportionate price. This is the crucial issue.

As for the land campaign, the real test there has still to be reached. The public are naturally suspicious of that familiar term of official language "according to plan," which in historical retrospect has so often been found to cover a pitfall. Yet it is a perfectly precise statement to say that the newly opened war in the west has up to this moment proceeded "according to expectations," save at two points.

The first of these exceptions is the early penetration of the area behind Liège enclosed by the Meuse and the Albert Canal. There was reason to hope that the resistance based upon these broad water-lines might have held up the Germans for a week or more, long enough for the Allied reinforcements to arrive and buttress the Belgian defence. The hope was frustrated by the fact that a key-bridge opposite the Dutch town of Maastricht fell intact into the invaders' hands, enabling them to rush tanks across without the delay that would otherwise have been entailed in bridging the Albert Canal.

In 1914 the fall of Liège and the loss of the Meuse "moat" was brought about by the fact that a German detachment achieved a surprise crossing at Lixhe, close to the Dutch

The Break-In

frontier, a little south of Maastricht. This gave the Germans a chance of penetrating the Liège defences from the rear. The news caused General Léman, the commander of Liège, to give orders that the field troops there should withdraw behind the city, and this news in turn persuaded King Albert that it was too late to assemble the bulk of the Army along the natural line of the Meuse. To guard against a repetition of this danger the Belgians some years ago built near Lixhe the very elaborate and expensive modern-style fort of Eben Emael. Unfortunately, this seems to have been taken from the rear as a result of the Germans' surprise crossing a few miles farther north this time.

On the other side of Liège, the German advance through the Ardennes ran generally in accord with expectations. Only delaying action, by the Chasseurs Ardennais, had been contemplated here. For it had been regarded as inevitable, in view of the comparative forces available, that the Germans would be able to push into this vast wooded pocket of Belgian Luxembourg, and that no definite barrier could be opposed to them until they came up against the Meuse itself. But it is unfortunate that their initial success in finding a path round the northern flank of Liège should, as a natural consequence, have caused the early isolation of the Liège fortress and also have endangered the defence of the Meuse between that place and Namur against the German forces pressing through the Ardennes.

This means that the first real stand against the invaders has presumably had to be based on the chord of the natural arc of defence—the short and fairly straight line from Antwerp, past Louvain and along the Dyle, to Namur. This has been long since prepared for defence,¹ and it is to be hoped that the Belgian and Allied forces have been able to occupy it in sufficient time to complete their dispositions and organization. Also, that they will be able to check

¹ When the British troops arrived to occupy this line, they found, however, that it had been far less adequately prepared than they had been led to expect.

The Current of War

and throw back any hostile forces which have succeeded in crossing the Meuse at points above Namur.

This brings us to the question of the new danger created by the Germans' thrust southward from the Ardennes across the French frontier near Sedan. It constitutes the second exception to the general run of expectation. The gorge-like valley of the Semois just over the Belgian frontier seemed to offer, if strongly held, a difficult obstacle to any rapid advance, and especially to the use of tanks. It is obvious that the crossing of the Meuse at Sedan would, if pushed deep enough to pierce the extension of the Maginot Line which runs along this sector, be of serious effect. But it is a danger which the mechanized divisions of the French Army have been designed to meet,¹ by mobile counter-strokes against the flanks of any narrow penetration of the semi-fortified front.²

The aim of the German offensive as a whole is not yet clear. It may have been designed with a dual or alternative objective—either to gain a spring-board for launching a close-range air attack on England, after the British air force

¹ Although designed for this purpose, their development had been perilously slow—even after the war came. In 1939 the French had only one armoured division and three light mechanized divisions (of converted cavalry) compared with the Germans' six heavy and five light divisions of this type. By May, 1940, the Germans had raised their mechanized strength to eight heavy and six light divisions, whereas the French were only in process of reorganizing to produce three armoured divisions out of their original one—the three together having fewer tanks than a single German armoured division.

² I used the term "semi-fortified" with a view to precision, and the correction of current delusions about the strength of this line. In the autumn of 1939 the so-called extension of the Maginot Line along the Franco-Belgian frontier consisted of no more than a single chain of concrete pill-boxes, often as much as a mile apart, covered by a single rather inadequate anti-tank ditch. By the spring of 1940 these defences had been considerably developed, in some sectors quadrupled; but the total depth of these "lines" along the Meuse sector was only some five miles. Moreover, although the pill-boxes were supposed to be armed with anti-tank guns, many of the loopholes were still empty.

Gamelin was apparently confident that, while the enemy's forces might penetrate the links of this pill-box chain, the effect of their penetration would be nullified because the unarmoured transport vehicles would not be able to follow the tanks, so that these would be deprived of the supplies necessary to maintain their advance. He counted on being able to switch his own reserves to the scene of any such penetration in time to round up the intruders when they were running short of petrol.

The Break-In

had been partly used up in opposing the invasion of the Low Countries ; or for a concentrated effort to turn the Maginot Line.

It is possible that the choice of the latter was intended to depend on how far the Germans succeeded in drawing the British Army and part of the French into Belgium, and then throwing them back before they could consolidate their position. If there seemed to be a good chance of pushing into northern France hard upon their withdrawal, or of driving past their flank by a thrust in the Sedan sector while they were occupied in Belgium, the centre of gravity might be shifted in that direction. And if this land offensive should be blocked, the German command would still retain the possibility of resorting to the air offensive against England—so long as an adequate proportion of its air strength remained intact.

There is a tendency to regard Hitler's offensive in the west as a desperate gambler's throw, due to a seriously strained economic situation. That may be so. On the other hand, it may be inspired by a state of supreme confidence, exalted by the way his recent success in Norway may appear to support the evidence of the swift overthrow of Poland.

Another cause may well lie in the psychological effect of the Allied statesmen's refusal to consider his earlier peace moves, combined with their constant declarations that our victory is certain. The feeling, " I'll show you," is one of the most common human incentives to drastic action, reckless of consequences.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BREAK-THROUGH

On the night of the 15th the Belgian communiqué stated that, while most of the enemy's attempts to cross the Meuse had failed, they had succeeded in gaining a "small" foothold on the left bank north of Dinant, as well as at Sedan. The forts of Namur and Antwerp were stated to be still intact, and those at Liège still resisting.

The French communiqué said that a German tank attack had been made at Gembloux, between Namur and Brussels, but that "we counter-attacked and hurled back the enemy." All that was said about the sector between Namur and Sedan was that "the enemy have even increased their pressure." A British Air Ministry communiqué supplemented this by the statement that on the 14th our bombers had attacked the bridges near Sedan; and claimed the destruction of four, although at a cost of thirty-five of our machines. Press correspondents reported that the Germans were now in contact with the British Army near Louvain along the line of the Dyle. Also, that the enemy's mechanized forces had apparently advanced far ahead of the main body, as no hostile artillery had come into action on the British front.

The German communiqué said: "Between Namur and Givet [south of Dinant] we have crossed the Meuse over a wide front."

.

On the night of the 16th the French communiqué was significantly vague, except for an ominous remark that between Namur and Sedan "the battle has taken on the characteristics of open warfare." In the French Chamber, M. Reynaud said: "Hitler wants to win the war in two months. If he fails he knows he is lost, but he has taken the risk."

The German communiqué stated that their progress beyond the Meuse had continued and that *south-east* of Sedan French counter-attacks had been repulsed.

The Break-Through

The Air Ministry announced that our bombers had attacked road and rail communications in Germany on the night of the 15th—"the heaviest attack yet made by the Royal Air Force during the war."

The German communiqué said: "During last night air-raids over Western Germany were carried out by enemy aeroplanes, and a number of bombs dropped indiscriminately. The material damage done was slight, but a number of German civilians were killed and wounded. Military objectives were neither attacked nor hit."

Mr. Churchill flew to Paris on the 16th to confer with M. Reynaud and General Gamelin, returning early on the 17th.

.

On the 17th, General Gamelin issued an *Order of the Day*, saying: "The fate of the country, that of our Allies, and the destiny of the world depends on the battle now taking place. . . . Every unit which is unable to advance must accept being killed rather than abandon the part of the national territory entrusted to it. As always in the critical hour of our destiny, the watchword to-day is 'Conquer or Die.' We must conquer."

To an analyst of military documents, experienced in "reading between the lines," it sounded most ominous. To anyone with practical experience of the psychology of troops in battle, it sounded most depressing.

The French official communiqué was so vague as to convey nothing: save the fact that the German thrust had penetrated to the neighbourhood of Rethel, 30 miles south-west of Sedan. A French War Office spokesman, while admitting that the situation was difficult, owing to the deep pocket which the enemy tanks had made, said that the result of operations on the 16th and 17th allowed a generally favourable impression. He explained that operations against this pocket would comprise two phases; first, the envelopment of the pocket and the stemming of the German push; second, the destruction of the German forces in it by massed artillery action. On the Franco-German frontier, along the whole length of the Maginot Line itself, "absolute calm reigned."

The German communiqué stated that French mechanized forces which opposed "our tanks" to the west of Dinant had been defeated, that the French forces in general were retreating in a westerly direction hotly pursued, and that the French

The Current of War

frontier defences—the westerly extension of the Maginot Line—had been pierced over a distance of 60 miles between Sedan and the Sambre, south of Maubeuge. The prisoners so far taken amounted to 12,000. French attacks south of Sedan, intended to create a diversion, had been checked. North of Namur, the Dyle position had been pierced between Gembloux and Wavre, and also north of Louvain. Following the “collapse” of the French and British resistance on this line, the German forces had marched into Brussels late in the afternoon (of the 17th).

[It is now known that on the 17th General Gamelin warned his Government that the mechanized spearhead of the German advance was approaching Laon, and that he could not guarantee the safety of Paris beyond that night. This intimation produced an upheaval.]

On the 18th the French Government was reconstructed. M. Reynaud, still remaining Prime Minister, took over the War Ministry from M. Daladier. Marshal Pétain became Vice-Premier, while M. Mandel was brought into the Cabinet. It was also announced that General Giraud had taken charge of the “Battle against the Bulge.” The situation there was said to be not so critical as “some had thought yesterday.” There had been no enemy pressure at the bottom of the pocket, on the Aisne sector.

The Germans stated that their pursuit was continuing on the upper reaches of the Sambre and down to the Oise.

Such was the state of strategic flux when I wrote the following comments on the situation.

“THE NEXT FEW DAYS ARE VITAL” (May 19)

SINCE my previous commentary on the situation last Thursday the threat presented by the German thrust near Sedan has assumed large proportions.

The narrow breach then reported as having been made in the French positions along the Meuse swiftly developed into a great bulge 20 miles deep and over 60 miles wide between Sedan and the Sambre. Great issues hang on what

The Break-Through

happens in the next few days—on the effectiveness of the Allied measures to create and cement a new barrier line to confine the spread of the intruding forces.

But the actual, as distinct from the potential, progress achieved by the Germans in France has hardly gone far enough to justify the tone and terms in which its effect was semi-officially described on Friday night. "Serious" would seem to be a more precise term than "grave" for the situation up to the moment.

It would appear that while the French reserves were seeking to prevent, with success, the enemy getting round the flanks of the Maginot Line proper, which lay to the east of the breach, the Germans were concentrating their efforts on rolling up the French line westwards in order to isolate, and threaten, the rear of the Allied left wing in Belgium.

The first definite result obtained by this menacing thrust from the Ardennes was to produce an indirect and distant "pull" on the French and British forces which had advanced to the support of the Belgian Army, compelling them to give up the advanced position which they had occupied on the Dyle, and withdraw west of Brussels.

This was an obvious precaution to diminish the risk to their elongated communications which would arise if the German spearhead were to be driven much further into their rear flank, across the Sambre westwards towards the Channel. A timely step back, though it unhappily meant yielding another belt of Belgian territory to the invader, might avert a greater risk to the Allied cause as a whole.¹

According to some reports the German air force had made comparatively little effort to interrupt the advance of the British forces from their prepared positions along the Belgian frontier to the Dyle near Louvain. If that be

¹ Not until the night of the 15th did Gamelin take the decision to withdraw the Allied forces from their advanced position in Belgium. And, owing to the state of confusion prevailing, his orders only reached General Billotte, the commander of the group of armies there, in the course of the next day. This delay inevitably imperilled the prospects of countering the enemy's thrust in their rear.

The Current of War

correct, the explanation may be that the German command was hoping to apply the key idea, reversed, of the Schlieffen plan before the last war.

Counting on the offensive doctrine of the French Army, the Germans then hoped to encourage the main French forces to push into Lorraine, towards the Rhine, while their own mass swept through Belgium and round in a gigantic wheel across the rear of the French armies. Like a revolving door, the more heavily the French pressed on one side the more forcibly would the other side swing round behind them. That design, though bungled in application, succeeded up to a point—far enough to bring the encircling Germans' right wing to the outskirts of Paris before they were stopped on the Marne and thrown back.

The German 1940 plan may have been a narrower yet more incisive repetition of the 1914 design on the opposite flank—aiming to draw the British Army and a large part of the French mobile forces into Belgium by the sudden attack on the Low Countries and then, having pierced and weakened part of the French front in the centre, make an armoured sweep to the Channel coast behind their backs.¹

Compared with the 1914 design the new pattern-move might not only go faster—because it was mechanized—but would not have to go so far before having a decisive effect. The nearest point on the Channel coast—near the mouth of the Somme—lies only 90 miles from the Sambre.

Since crossing the Meuse near Sedan the German armoured forces have already extended their drive 60 miles to the west in reaching Landrecies and Guise—two famous battle sites of the 1914 advance. Happily, there was a check on their progress yesterday, even though their attacks were resumed this morning.

While such a pause may be partly explained by the inevitable need to refuel and carry out the usual mainten-

¹ Within a couple of days it became clear that this was the enemy's aim—not a direct threat towards Paris.

The Break-Through

ance work on their machines, it is of definite help to the Allied forces in completing their new dispositions to form a barrier and to develop a counter-pressure if possible.

Moreover, even with a steel-shod thrust, the point may have lost its original sharpness when it has to be used for a second thrust. It will certainly be contrary to all experience hitherto if a renewal of the push attains the same proportionate measure of success as the first effort did.

The law of diminishing returns has prevailed with remarkable consistency in the operations of modern warfare between armies of more or less similar quality and equipment. Only a lack of adequate anti-tank weapons or a widespread break in morale would be likely to produce a decisive exception to this rule.¹

If the immediate danger should be definitely checked, the balance of probability is that the subsequent outlook on the Western front would improve. While the breadth that the German break-through has attained is detrimental to the prospects of pinching out the enemy, the depth of the present bulge is not yet in itself acutely dangerous to the French front as a whole. It does not compare with the serious strategic effect of the three great bulges which the Germans made in the Allied front in 1918, still less with the desperately ominous situation of the Allied armies on the eve of the Battle of the Marne in 1914.

The German offensives in March, April, and May, 1918, came within close reach of the main lateral railway communications on which the Allied armies were largely dependent for their maintenance and the necessary switching of reserves. The present thrust would have to be pushed considerably deeper before it could touch any artery that is of vital importance.

¹ Subsequent evidence revealed that there was an appalling shortage of anti-tank weapons, especially on the Sedan sector; this lack of means to combat the enemy's tanks, combined with a similar lack of means to combat his dive-bombers, went far to account for the break in morale which is now known to have occurred.

The Current of War

On the night of the 19th the French communiqué said less than ever, although inspired reports had claimed that the Germans had suffered a heavy defeat in the Avesnes region, where the French were said to have recaptured Le Cateau and Landreccies.

The German communiqué said that their forces had crossed both the Sambre and the Oise, and that St. Quentin as well as Le Cateau was in their hands. In northern Belgium, they had occupied Antwerp, and crossed the Scheldt west of the city. So far 110,000 prisoners had been counted, excluding the Dutch Army. [In four days the German mechanized forces, after crossing the Meuse, had advanced 75 miles in their oblique thrust.]

The same night in a broadcast, his first as Prime Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill said that a regroupment of the French armies had been proceeding for several days, in order to strike at the "intruding wedge" which the German armoured forces had driven in "north of the Maginot Line." He pointed out that "if they are behind our front, the French are also at many points fighting actively behind theirs. Both sides are therefore in an extremely dangerous position." If the French and British armies were well handled, as he believed they would be, there might be a sudden transformation of the scene.

"It would be foolish, however, to disguise the gravity of the hour. It would be still more foolish to lose heart and courage or to suppose that well-trained and well-equipped armies numbering three or four millions of men can be overcome in the space of a few weeks, or even months, by a scoop or raid by mechanized vehicles, however formidable. We may look forward with confidence to the stabilization of the front in France and to the general engagement of the masses which will enable the qualities of French and British soldiers to be matched squarely against those of their adversaries." "Only a very small part of that splendid Army has yet been heavily engaged," whereas "practically the whole" of the enemy's mechanized forces had been thrown into the battle and had suffered "very heavy losses."

"The armies must cast away the idea of resisting attack behind concrete lines or natural obstacles, and must realize that mastery can only be regained by furious, unrelenting assault.

"I have received from the Chiefs of the French Republic,

The Break-Through

and in particular its indomitable Prime Minister, M. Reynaud, their sacred pledges that, whatever happens, they will fight to the end, be it bitter or be it glorious. Nay, if we fight to the end it can only be glorious."

.

Next morning it was made known that General Weygand had been appointed Commander-in-Chief in place of General Gamelin.

.

This news, in conjunction with the signs of continued belief in the attacking power of the French infantry masses, disquieted me more than the events which had led up to it. While recognizing General Weygand's strength of character, I was aware that as Chief of the French Army during the crucial years from 1931 to 1935 he had been more conservative in his attitude towards mechanization and the new ideas of mobile warfare than his successor, General Gamelin. It was hard to see how a man of seventy-three, brought back to command in a crisis, could suddenly grasp the new conception—well enough to apply the appropriate counter-technique in the most effective way.

It seemed to me only too probable that, repeating the pattern of the Marne battles of 1914 and 1918, he would seek to assemble a mass of infantry divisions on the flanks of the German break-through for a traditional pincer-like offensive. And that, if he waited to do this, he would find too late that the German armoured forces—relying on the bluntness of his infantry pincers—had swept on through the gap to the sea, cutting the Allied communications. It seemed to me, also, that if at this critical moment the Allied Command cast away the idea of resisting behind natural obstacles, and tried to use such troops as were available for furious assaults in the old fashion, they would not only prove ineffective but forfeit the chances that remained of damming the torrent-like advance of the enemy's mechanized forces. For there were still a few water-lines in the enemy's path, where his onrush might be stemmed if every available motorized unit were to be rushed to hold these natural obstacles to mechanized force—instead of being thrown away in vain attempts to assault armour and machine-guns with flesh and blood, in the open field. Nothing could be more fatal to the Allies' chances of saving the situation

The Current of War

than to revert from an inadequate conception of the new warfare to a fundamentally obsolete conception. To counter the enemy's exploitation of the new conception, it was essential to understand the way it operated.

Concern at the dangers of continued misunderstanding of it, in this country, moved me to write the following article that day.

"WE MUST UNDERSTAND WHAT HAS HAPPENED"

(May 20)

In gauging the prospects of checking the German offensive, and determining the best course we can take, it is of the first importance to understand how its results have been attained. There is a fundamental difference between the method on which the present German offensive has been carried out and that of 1914. I am not referring to the fact that it has taken the form of a penetration of the French centre followed by a turn outwards to the right towards the coast, whereas the 1914 offensive was a sweeping advance round the French coastward flank followed by a swing inwards to the left. Nor is it merely that the means have greatly developed from those employed a quarter of a century ago. These differences are not fundamental.

Far more striking is the way that the Germans have realized, and exploited, the decisive importance of machine-power compared with man-power.

The basic factor in their success hitherto has been that, instead of relying on masses as in 1914, they have pinned their faith to the penetrative power of a highly mechanized force manned by relatively small numbers—to quality rather than quantity. It would appear that three armoured divisions operating in conjunction with perhaps three hundred dive-bombers and backed up by a few motorized divisions, made the breach which shook the defences of France and thereby loosened the defence of Belgium. The number of men employed in this vital thrust were but a tiny

The Break-Through

fraction of the total arrayed along the frontiers.¹ The German advance of 1914 may be likened to an invading tide—of marching men; the advance of 1940, to a torrent—of machines. On meeting a dam, the torrent makes a crack, penetrates it, and expands again beyond until another dam is met, when the process is repeated.

The Germans' torrent may have profited from the fact that the French defences had less depth than their own Siegfried system. Even so, the comparatively linear type of defence adopted by the French might well have sufficed if there had been an equivalent of armoured divisions behind the line ready to deliver an early counter-stroke. But the French did not have adequate divisions of this kind. Nor could we supply the deficiency.

While we are now coming to talk about "total warfare," shouting the term as if it were a new slogan to save thought, the Germans have progressed a stage beyond it. While we show no idea fresher than repeating the last war, carried to a more extreme pitch in producing quantity of force, the Germans have already gained a striking advantage by exploiting the conception of "qualitative warfare."

Their conscript masses have helped to mask from us and our Allies the significance of the special skeleton-keys which they were forging for their purpose. It is through the use of picked forces, with the essential character of volunteers, that they have opened the way for their recent startling achievements. The men who compose these key-forces comprise only a small fraction of their total man-power. These chosen men, who fulfil the "Gideon principle," are represented by the tank crews, the aircraft crews, and the

¹ Although some 120 German divisions were deployed on the Western Front when the offensive began, and 80 of them on the chosen front of attack between the end of the Maginot Line and the northern border of Holland, it would appear that the real stroke across the Meuse was carried out almost entirely by the armoured divisions, backed up by the motorized divisions—and that the infantry divisions were not seriously engaged, except on the Dutch front in the opening phase, and against the Belgian front in the final phase.

The Current of War

parachutists. While we are still measuring military strength in obsolete terms of armed numbers, the Germans have demonstrated that they were calculating in up-to-date terms of "power-units."

Yet their conception is not such a novelty as it may appear to most of our statesmen and public. It is merely an advance to the stage which was reached by our more advanced military thinkers soon after the last war. What the German Command has done is to put into practice ideas from which it was not too proud to learn, whereas our own authorities, distrusting them as untried "theories," considered it safer to keep in the familiar rut. There is nothing so unsafe, for a nation, as military conservatism.

The remainder of the article was cut. It dealt with the way that the technique of mechanized warfare had been developed, and finished by urging that it was not too late to make use of the forward-thinking officers who had been responsible—since "those who were the first to develop, long ago, the methods which the enemy has borrowed with such startling success, are the most likely to lose no time in devising the best counter to them."

.

That same day the French admitted that the enemy had reached the St. Quentin area in the west, though the actual situation was obscure. They stated that, in the centre, German troops who had succeeded in crossing the Aisne had been thrown back over the river.

The German communiqué stated that their armoured and motorized forces had reached the Cambrai-Peronne road, thus gaining the old Somme battlefield of 1916. They claimed that they had broken up a French armoured division that was moving north from Laon and forced it to turn round. [This was a reference, apparently, to the counter-stroke carried out there by General de Gaulle's new division—it was still in process of formation and comprised only 30 heavy tanks and 80 light tanks.] They also said that the British were withdrawing from Belgium, and "trying by forced marches to reach the Channel ports." Near Mauburge and south of

The Break-Through

Valenciennes "attacks by French and Belgian forces, trying to find a way out towards the south have been repulsed." After "this unavailing attempt to break through" they were "retreating to the west, badly shaken." That night (the 20th) I was asked to make a short comment on the situation. In it, I said :

"The spearhead of the German advance, which is composed of armoured divisions preceded and supported by dive-bombers, has now turned westwards, after piercing, near Sedan, a relatively weak sector of the French front. It is thrusting towards the Channel coast, with the obvious aim of cutting off the forces of the Allied left wing fighting in Belgium, or, at the least, of compelling them to evacuate Belgium in order to meet the threat to their rear.

It is clear that if the German thrust could reach Amiens, a very dangerous situation would be created, particularly for the British Army, for this would then be separated from its main bases and be dependent on ports such as Boulogne, Calais, and Dunkirk, which are not only of limited shipping capacity, but would be within close range of advanced German air bases.

It should be realized, however, that the Germans in their westward advance have not yet reached even the line on which they stood from 1914 to 1918. That line ran barely 60 miles from the coast, but did not prove a serious hindrance to the necessary flow of supplies and reinforcements during all those years."

On the 21st the Germans' westward drive reached Amiens, while their motor-cyclists were subsequently reported as having entered Abbeville, near the mouth of the Somme.

In a speech to the French Senate, M. Reynaud began by saying : "The country is in danger. My first duty is to tell the truth to the Senate and the country."

After reminding them that the frontier fortifications consisted of two parts—the Maginot Line along the Franco-German frontier and the lighter line along the Franco-Belgian frontier

The Current of War

—he explained that, upon the German invasion of the Low Countries, the left wing of the French Army had moved out of its fortifications, and, pivoting on Sedan, advanced into Belgium and even into Holland. Thereupon the enemy had taken the opportunity to strike at the joint.

“The Meuse—apparently a difficult river to cross—had been wrongly considered as a redoubtable obstacle for the enemy. That is the reason why the French divisions, under General Corap, which were entrusted with its defence were few and were spread out over a great area along the river. In addition, the Corap Army, composed of divisions not so well officered and less well trained, were put there, the best troops forming part of the left wing marching into Belgium.

“The Meuse is a difficult river and difficult to defend. Machine-gun fire on the flank is impossible and infiltration is easy for manœuvring troops. Add to that the fact that more than half the infantry divisions of the Corap Army had not yet reached the Meuse, although they had the shortest movement to make: since they were nearest to the point. [It would appear that there were only 3 divisions in line, on a front of some 40 miles; and these consisted of elderly Territorials or Senegalese—who had shown themselves peculiarly liable to panic, in face of the unexpected, during the last war.]

“That was not all. As a result of incredible mistakes, which will be punished, the bridges over the Meuse were not destroyed. Over these bridges there passed the German ‘Panzer’ divisions, preceded by fighter aeroplanes which came to attack divisions which were scattered, ill-cadred, and badly trained for such attacks.

“You now understand the disaster and the total disorganization of the Corap Army. It was thus that the hinge of the French Army was broken.”

“At eight o’clock this morning the High Command informed me that Arras and Amiens had been occupied.

“How have we got to this point? Is the moral value of our army in doubt? Not at all. The fighting which took place in Belgium during the first days proved it. The truth is that our classic conception of the conduct of war has come up against a new conception. At the basis of this conception there is not only the massive use of heavy armoured divisions or co-operation between them and aeroplanes, but the creation of

'The Break-Through

disorder in the enemy's rear by means of parachute raids, which, in Holland, nearly caused the fall of The Hague, and in Belgium seized the strongest fort of Liège.

"I will not speak to you of the false news and the orders given by means of the telephone to the civil authorities with the object, for example, of causing hurried evacuations.

"The Senate will understand that of all the tasks which confront us the most important is clear thinking. We must think of the new type of warfare which we are facing and take immediate decisions. This surprise is not the first that we have suffered and then overcome in the course of our history."

"France cannot die. As for me, if I were told to-morrow that only a miracle could save France I should reply: 'I believe in miracles because I believe in France.'"

.

The French communiqué merely said that the situation "remains confused between the Somme and the Cambrai region." A British communiqué from France said that repeated German attacks south of the Scarpe and against the Scheldt position were successfully beaten off by the Allied forces. [The British forces subsequently, however, withdrew from the Scheldt to the Lys.]

The German communiqué stated that their tank corps and motorized troops had taken Arras, Amiens, and Abbeville, as well as Laon. They claimed that the French 9th Army (Corap's) had been "liquidated," and that General Giraud, on arriving to take charge, had instead been taken prisoner. In gaining these results, they had owed much to their "complete control of the air."

[Captain Falls, the Military Correspondent of *The Times*, had put his finger on this vital spot when he wrote on the 18th that "almost everything hangs upon the air factor," and suggested that, as our fighter machines had proved the best answer to the dive-bomber, we ought to spare all we could to support the French Army—as the lesser of our two risks.]

.

The difference between the new conception and the old was illustrated, again, in the communiqués of the 22nd. The French said that they now held Arras, after mentioning that the enemy's advance towards the coast had continued "in

The Current of War

the form of raids by small motorized detachments." This read as if they did not consider such infiltration mattered so long as their own forces held a flanking bastion like Arras. The German communiqué said that the penetration to the Channel coast had been "extended to the north-west in the direction of St. Pol and Montreuil-sur-Mer"—which had been Haig's headquarters in the last war. It also gave the first news of the first attempt, by the British, to cut through their channel of advance—saying: "At Arras dive-bombers largely contributed to the failure of the attack of British mechanized units." [Actually, the braking effect was chiefly on the infantry who were following the tank advance, and were unable to profit by the opportunity which our heavily armoured "infantry" tanks had created—by disorganizing the German motorized troops.]

Reports from Paris published on the 23rd said that the recapture of Arras, coupled with the news of Weygand's appointment, had produced a manifest recovery in French morale. M. Reynaud, returning from a visit to the front, declared: "If we hold out one month—and we shall hold out for the necessary time—we shall have gone three-quarters of the way to victory." [It would seem that Weygand did not share such optimism—and questionable whether Reynaud himself did.]

That day I wrote a further article. In it, I was especially concerned to emphasize that there would be little promise in a carefully mounted counter-offensive of the customary French type, directed at the shoulders of the German wedge. The longer Weygand waited, in order to make it stronger, the slighter would be the prospects.

.

"PROMPT ACTION MAY SAVE THE DAY"

(May 23)

It would be folly to minimize the gravity of the news that the armoured prongs of the German advance have reached the Channel coast near Boulogne as well as Abbeville.

In summing up the strategic situation for last Tuesday's paper, it was observed that according to the latest reports the Germans had not yet advanced farther west than the

The Break-Through

points they reached in 1914, nor passed the line on which the Allies maintained themselves for the next four years. At the same time it was pointed out that if the enemy thrust were to reach Amiens "a very dangerous situation would be created." Later that day the Germans announced, and the French admitted, that their armoured forces had taken Amiens. The strategic importance of this centre of communications is unmistakable. Since then this thrust has been driven deeper still, to Abbeville, while a fresh thrust has penetrated to Boulogne. There should be no need to point out the effect on the position of the Allied forces north of this two-pointed enemy wedge unless it can be quickly forced out, and communication reopened with the main part of France.

Once again, as in the case of our attempted counter-offensive in Norway, time is the essence of the problem. Time consumed in preparing an orthodox attack with strong artillery support may seem to promise greater weight in the blow, but will allow the invader to consolidate the natural defensive line along a series of rivers and canals, from the Somme to the Aisne, which he has apparently secured with a view to covering his left flank. Beyond the difficulty of overcoming such a line by deliberate attack once it has been properly welded, account must be taken of the inevitably increasing danger to the British, French, and Belgian forces now cut off in the north. For the continued effectiveness of any force depends on the assurance of its supplies, and this in turn on the maintenance of its lines of supply.

The development of bombing power since the last war makes it more difficult now than it would have been then to maintain a position, which is virtually a great bridge-head, covering the Channel ports—especially as these ports are of limited capacity compared with the ocean-traffic ports farther west. One compensating factor in the problem is that Calais, Boulogne, and even Dunkirk are so close to our

The Current of War

own coast as to facilitate their defence by fighter squadrons operating from bases on the English side of the Channel. This might be a means of ensuring their continued use as ports of supply for the Allied forces fighting in the north, if these remain isolated. It might, also, be an aid to the secure execution of a withdrawal, if such a step became necessary.

In the absence of clear official indications as to the general line now occupied by the Allied forces in northern France and Flanders, it is difficult to go further into their problems and prospects, even were it desirable to do so. The whole situation remains hazy. This is unfortunate, since the most important task of the moment, as M. Reynaud emphasized in his striking speech on Tuesday night, is "clear thinking."

Clear thinking requires the clearest possible presentation of the facts. It also demands cool heads—both among the people and in their leaders.

It must be recognized that the German Command have used their new instruments, not in a direct effort to smash opposition, but in a much more skilful application of the strategy of indirect approach. The strategy of their successive moves is worth study.

It would seem that, seeing our preoccupation with the iron-ore traffic through Norwegian waters, they sought to intensify it by their surprise coup against Norway, hoping also to divert thither a considerable part of our forces. While our attention was fixed on the Norwegian campaign, they suddenly moved against the Low Countries. This obvious threat led the Allied left wing to advance, from their fortified positions along the French frontier, to the support of the Belgians and Dutch. If a military risk, such a move to the rescue was a political necessity on our part—as the Germans probably foresaw. The risk was unduly increased by taking divisions away from the sector facing Belgian Luxemburg, which was entrusted to second-rate divisions,

'The Break-Through'

thinly spread. This hazardous decision of the French Command was based on the calculation that the difficult country of the Ardennes, and the natural barrier line of the Meuse behind it, would hinder any serious thrust in this area. But the enemy, having achieved his purpose of distraction, launched his armoured spear-head against this weakened hinge—on the calculation that natural obstacles can be overcome more easily than armed opposition.

Having penetrated the rather shallow French defences on this sector, the enemy's armoured forces did not push on far to the south, towards Paris—for it might be expected that the French reserves would be rushed thither to cover the capital. Instead, the Germans turned westward, astride the rear of the Allied left wing which had advanced into Belgium. By cutting its communications and cutting off its supplies the Germans might hope to weaken its power to strike an effective blow in reverse against the right flank of their own wedge. At the same time they made haste to secure a line of westward-running rivers and canals to cover their own left flank against a counter-offensive from the south by the main French forces.

Thus, having themselves cleverly avoided throughout the hazards of a direct attack, they now hope to transfer to themselves the inherent advantage of the defensive—in meeting any direct attack which the Allied Command makes to reunite its forces and reopen its communications. It is clear that the German plan has been based on the idea of carrying out a strategic offensive of an indirect kind with the aim of forcing the Allies in general to undertake the tactical offensive, a much more costly operation, in order to rescue the isolated part of their armies in the north.

With every day that passes the sides of the German wedge are likely to be strengthened. Thus the chance of reuniting the severed parts of the Allied army may depend on the prompt use of its mechanized forces, so far as such troops are available, to break through the points of the wedge. A

The Current of War

counter-offensive by infantry divisions could hardly be expected to progress fast enough—even if it were directed against the at present comparatively weak tip of the enemy's wedge.

While I was finishing this article, I heard that Mr. Churchill had announced in the House of Commons that the German armoured forces had penetrated north-westward as far as Boulogne, where heavy fighting was proceeding.

A communiqué from the B.E.F. that evening stated that while our troops had "successfully maintained" their positions near Arras, the enemy had succeeded in passing his mechanized forces through the gap and on to the coast. The French communiqué stated that their troops, pushing southward, had advanced to the outskirts of Cambrai.

The German communiqué stated that enemy attacks at Cambrai, with the aim of breaking through the corridor, were repulsed with heavy losses. It also said that the German advanced forces were now moving on Calais, while in Flanders the south-westward advance of their armies was slowly gaining ground across the Scheldt "in face of strong resistance."

Battice, the second of the modern Belgian forts around Liège, had surrendered—after holding out for almost a fortnight. The smallness of its garrison was shown in the statement that the prisoners taken there amounted to 20 officers and 650 men. The Germans also admitted that "on the south front of Namur a number of forts are still in the hands of the enemy." While these facts formed a tribute to the Belgian defenders, they also suggested that the German Army's means of breaking into proper fortifications was not nearly as powerful comparatively as in 1914—and that it had been fortunate to find a front so weakly fortified and weakly held as the so-called extension of the Maginot Line in the Sedan sector.

.

On the 24th the Germans announced that they had pushed on from the Scheldt to the Lys, had captured Tournai, and entered Ghent—on the other flank. And in London it was stated that the Germans' other horn, the armoured one, had forced our troops to evacuate Boulogne.

The Break-Through

The French said that their troops had made progress in an attack from the south on Amiens, and entered the suburbs. General Duval, the French military writer who had long been the voice of orthodoxy, declared : " It seems as if the rôle of the German mechanized forces is finished." He went on to say that the issue would be decided, not at Boulogne, but by the infantry battle on the Scheldt.

.

On the 25th, the communiqués differed more than usual—but in view rather than in fact. The Germans said that they now surrounded Calais, and that by the strengthening of " the ring " round the Allied armies in the north this had " thereby been finally closed." Ghent and Courtrai had been taken, and on the southern flank, Vimy Ridge. The French dwelt on their progress in local attacks on the river-line of the Somme. [It later became clear that these had brought no compensating advantage for the losses incurred.]

On the 26th the British communiqué stated that in Flanders the enemy had launched a strong offensive against the Belgian forces on our left, and that British troops had gone to their assistance. [This referred to the recall from Arras of the 5th and 50th divisions, which had made the abortive attack southward on the 21st, and had been intended to take part in Weygand's projected pincer-like counter-offensive on the 26th. After their departure for the north, this was abandoned.]

It may be remarked that during these days the maps published in the Press were for the most part so conservative in representing the German progress as to misrepresent the situation, and obscure its realities.

On the 27th the Germans announced that they had driven a deep wedge into the Belgian front, past Menin almost as far as Ypres—and also that they had occupied Calais on the previous day. This left Dunkirk as the only port of entry, or exit, available for the British Army.

.

At 4 a.m. on May 28th the Belgian Army ceased fire, following the German acceptance of King Leopold's request (at 5 p.m. on the 27th) for an armistice. This decision was bitterly denounced by M. Reynaud in a broadcast at 8.30 a.m. : " The King, who, eighteen days before, had appealed for

'The Current of War

Allied help, has now, without any warning to the Allied Forces, laid down his arms. This is a deed without precedent in history." Mr. Churchill's statement was more restrained, advising a suspension of judgment. But the greater part of the British and French Press, as well as various public spokesmen, burst into violent denunciation of King Leopold. He was described as "King of the Fifth Column," and portrayed in cartoons as a crowned serpent. Even an ex-statesman so experienced as Lord Derby spoke of him as being shown to be "a master mind of perfidy and treachery."

Such hasty judgments were more discreditable to those who jumped to them than to their target. If in most cases they were merely an outlet for the emotions of the moment, in other cases they could be traced to opportunism in seizing upon a scapegoat on whom to shift blame.

It should have been clear to anyone that the Belgian Army was in a hopeless position, owing to the collapse in France. Such dim hope as it had of salvation disappeared when Weygand's projected counter-offensive did not materialize. And, in such a plight, King Leopold can hardly have been unaffected by the manifest signs of his Allies' precautionary steps for a withdrawal. It was, in human nature, too much to expect that a national army, which lacked the equipment necessary for its own defence, should continue an indefinite sacrifice merely to facilitate the escape of others. Moreover, there is reason to doubt the validity of the main charge laid against King Leopold—that he failed to warn his Allies.

According to the evidence of the American Ambassador in Brussels, he had specifically warned us as early as the 25th that capitulation was inevitable unless early and effective relief could be given to its situation.

At midday on the 26th he notified the French that, while intending to fight on until his resources were completely exhausted, the limits of possible resistance had almost been reached. On the morning of the 27th the last small reserve was thrown into the fight, but about midday a fresh gap developed, leaving an open path to the Belgians' rear. Thereupon King Leopold sent a final message to the Allies that capitulation was now inevitable. A few hours later, at 5 p.m., an envoy left the Belgian headquarters to enter the German lines with a request for an armistice. But King Leopold

The Break-Through

utilized the interval to transport towards Dunkirk a French division which had been supporting his left flank.

Also, in the last phase, he destroyed the bridges across the Yser and flooded the coastal area, as a bar to the Germans' approach to Dunkirk and the northern flank of his Allies.

.

Any prospect, if it had existed, of the Allies holding on to a narrow foothold in Flanders, disappeared in this altered situation. The retreat to Dunkirk was hastened, while the Admiralty collected every kind of small craft that could be found to help in bringing away the troops. Their evacuation by sea swelled to large proportions on May 30, and became still larger on the next two days. On June 2 Mr. Eden (who had become Secretary of State for War in Mr. Churchill's Government) stated that four-fifths of the British Army had been saved. On the 4th the French announced that the embarkation of the forces defending Dunkirk had been completed on the previous night. That same morning the Germans announced that Dunkirk had been captured, and that "40,000 prisoners and an incalculable quantity of war material have fallen into our hands."

On June 4 Mr. Churchill made a long statement in Parliament on the campaign. He remarked that "eight or nine armoured divisions" had "cut off all communications between us and the main French Armies." "Behind this armoured and mechanized onslaught came a number of German divisions in lorries, and behind them again there plodded, comparatively slowly, the dull, brute mass of the ordinary German Army. . . ." The former had sufficed to encircle the Allied armies in Belgium. He told the House of Commons: "I had feared that it would be my hard lot to announce from this box the greatest military disaster in our long history. I thought—and some good judges agreed with me—that perhaps 20,000 or 30,000 men might be re-embarked. But . . . the whole root and core and brain of the British Army, on which, and around which, we were to build and are to build, the great British armies of the later years of the war, seemed about to perish upon the field or to be led into an ignominious and starving captivity. That was the prospect a week ago. But another blow which might well have proved final was yet to fall upon us."

The Current of War

Mr. Churchill then referred to the Belgian capitulation, emphasizing that King Leopold had "called upon us to come to his aid." He remarked that, if the Belgians had "not sought refuge in what has proved to be a fatal neutrality, the French and British armies might well at the very outset have saved not only Belgium, but perhaps even Poland"—a suggestion which was rather difficult to understand, in view of the balance of forces, and the strategic obstacles. Mr. Churchill, however, passed on to more recent events, and in regard to them abandoned his earlier restraint. "Suddenly, without prior consultation, with the least possible notice, without the advice of his ministers, and upon his own personal act, he sent a plenipotentiary to the German Command, surrendered his army, and exposed our whole flank and means of retreat. I asked the House a week ago to suspend its judgment because the facts were not clear, but I do not feel that any reason now exists why we should not form our own opinions upon this pitiful episode."

Mr. Churchill then dwelt on the dangers which the British Army had run before it succeeded in re-embarking at Dunkirk. In regard to this, he announced that a total of 335,000 [which included 120,000 French] had been brought away. At the same time, he said that our losses in men had exceeded 30,000 killed, wounded, and missing. Moreover, our losses in material had been "enormous"—"nearly 1000 guns, all our transport, and all the armoured vehicles that were with the army in the north."

While emphasizing that "we must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of victory," he pointed out that "there was a victory inside this deliverance which should be noted. It was gained by the Air Force." From this reflection he passed on to a prophetic reflection: "The great French Army was very largely, for the time being, cast back and disturbed by the onrush of a few thousand of armoured vehicles. May it not be also that the cause of civilization itself will be defended by the skill and devotion of a few thousand airmen?"

.

Three days earlier I had been asked to write an article on the probable development of the situation, This follows:

The Break-Through

"THE OUTLOOK NOW"

(June 2)

While it would be foolish to pretend that recent events have not spelt a serious reverse for the Allies, there is something more than consolation to be found in the way they have managed to bring away such a large proportion of the forces that were encircled in northern France. That feat has given the enemy cause for astonishment.

Moreover, against the fresh dangers that now loom near may be set the appearance of certain favourable signs—both in the air and on the ground. If the next week or two confirms these indications, history may yet record the present situation as the proverbial "darkest hour before the dawn."

Last week saw the logical fulfilment—up to a point—of the situation produced by the sweep of the German mechanized forces round the flank and across the rear of the Allied armies in Belgium. By seizing the water-lines of the Aisne and the Somme to cover the left flank of their own advance they created a "strategic barrage" such as was the aim of the Napoleonic "*manceuvre sur les derrières*"—cutting the communications of the Allied forces in the north, while barring the advance of relieving forces from the south. The occupation of such a focal railway centre as Amiens made the effect all the worse.

Once the "strategic barrage" was extended to the sea, the position of the forces in Flanders was virtually hopeless—unless French reserves from the south could break through the Somme barrier-line and reopen a coastal corridor. When no effective counter-offensive developed, the only question that remained was whether the Germans would achieve a "super-Sedan."

When they surrounded the Marshal MacMahon's army at Sedan in 1870, by a somewhat similar *manceuvre* of indirect approach, and forced its surrender, their bag of

The Current of War

prisoners amounted to 82,000 men. By their 1940 mechanized manoeuvre, beginning at Sedan, they had cut off forces over ten times as large. It was curious to observe how slow many of the public were to realize the potential significance of their arrival at Abbeville and Boulogne. It foreshadowed the doom of hopes that any appreciable part of Belgium could be preserved. For it could hardly be expected that forces totalling nearly a million men could for long be adequately supplied and munitioned through the limited ports which remained in Allied hands. If the sudden capitulation of the Belgian part of these forces accentuated the immediate danger to the British and French parts, it brought some compensating simplification of the ultimate problem. And, in the outcome, the successful fighting retreat to Dunkirk has spoilt the Germans' reasonable hopes of achieving a super-Sedan.

Even if much of the equipment may have had to be left behind, this can be replaced more easily than highly trained men—and the bulk of our Regular Army was with the B.E.F. in France. Thanks to the splendid work of the Navy and the Air Force, as well as their own tenacity, they "live to fight another day." Moreover, the way that they made good their withdrawal to the sea—like a greater "Ten Thousand" of Xenophon—despite being menaced on both flanks, is suggestive evidence that the power of modern defence, far from having been exaggerated, is even greater than was estimated before the war—when executed by troops who have up-to-date training and equipment as well as high morale.

When such proof is provided by the performance of the British Army, it is regrettable that it should be accompanied by such a display of military ignorance and unstable judgment as has marked many public comments on, and conclusions from, the events of the last three weeks—despite M. Reynaud's frankness about the "incredible mistakes" which have paved the way for the enemy's break-through

The Break-Through

on the Meuse. Those who have been the prime advocates of mechanization had long since recognized that wide rivers and canals were a most formidable obstacle to successful tank attack. Yet the bridges over the Meuse, like those over the Albert Canal, were allowed to fall intact into the enemy's hands, so that his armoured divisions were able to lose no time in the passage. It is curious to recall that in May, 1936, I had occasion to point out the possibility that if the French advanced into Belgium the Germans "would launch a flank counter-stroke through Belgian Luxembourg with their mechanized divisions."

The effect of this series of blunders became all the worse because the improvised army entrusted with this vital sector was composed of divisions which were not only "few," but of inferior training—and, even then, half of them failed to arrive in time. The danger was deepened by the shallowness and comparative frailty of the so-called extension of the Maginot Line along this originally neutral frontier. The Allied cause may have suffered much from the chilly reception that is said to have been given last autumn to Mr. Hore-Belisha's proposal to use the resources of the big civil engineering contractors to build, along the Belgian frontier, fortifications equal in strength to those of the Maginot Line proper.

Before the war one estimated that a superiority approaching 3 to 1—not in numbers of men, but in weapons such as aircraft and tanks—was necessary to give the offensive a good chance of decisive success. The Germans appear to have enjoyed fully that superiority when they launched their offensive. But when one takes account of the blunders that opened the way for them, and also of the way the British Army has eluded their attempt to round it up, it seems questionable whether even that ratio can be reckoned sufficient.

Once the German armoured forces were through the crust of the French defences, their rapid and confusion-spreading

The Current of War

advance fulfilled the predictions that Colonel Fuller and other British pioneers of mechanized warfare had made years ago. As for their technique, it seems to have followed the lines worked out in 1934 by our first modern tank brigade under Brigadier Hobart—lines which were viewed with scepticism by our authorities at the time. It has been left to the Germans, unfortunately, to prove how practical they were. One of the ironies, and tragedies, of the present situation is that the mechanized warfare experts of the British Army have never been given due scope—more frequently, they have been put on the shelf. And such ideas were slower still to make headway in the French Army.

Hence their comparative lack of mobile armoured divisions with which to counter the Germans' sudden break-through—the kind of counter-stroke which, if made with adequate speed and power, might well have nipped danger in the bud. The capacity of the French forces for delaying action may also have suffered from the inelasticity of their tactical methods since the last war. It is a common mistake to regard them as defensively minded and trained—rather have they concentrated until recently on a complex and deliberate technique of attack, with massive artillery support, in the 1918 style. Such a technique was liable to be thrown out of gear, in open country, by an enemy's mobile thrusts. The results, together with the scarcity of modern mechanized units, may tend to explain what has puzzled the public—why the widely anticipated French counter-offensive, against the German corridor to the sea, did not mature.

The direction in which the Germans strike next may depend on their estimate of the effect that their previous strokes have had on the French Army as a whole. If they believe it to be seriously shaken they may choose to turn south for a follow-through stroke while the moment seems ripe, rather than attempt as yet the much-heralded campaign against England.

The Break-Through

Their latest efforts to get Italy to join in the war, and exert a converging pressure on the French Mediterranean front, may indicate the adoption of such a plan. But the French have been allowed time to entrench their new front along the Somme and Aisne ; their Alpine frontier is so strong as to facilitate economy of force in covering it ; and the rallying power of the French soldier has been splendidly proved many times.

Another factor in the decision may be the extent to which the Germans have used up their air and armoured forces in the past three weeks' intensive action. If all estimates are uncertain, the last few days have brought several significant signs that the cream of the German pilots—whose quality matters more than the quantity of their machines—has been skimmed off in large measure.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE KNOCK-OUT—OF FRANCE

After a meeting of the Supreme War Council in Paris on June 2, a communiqué was issued saying, that : "The Allied Governments and peoples are more than ever implacably resolved to pursue in the closest possible concord their present struggle until complete victory is achieved."

On June 3 a strong German air-raid was made on Paris—the first since the war began. The French announced that it had caused some 200 casualties ; the figures were later increased to 900. A German communiqué that day stated that 330,000 French and British prisoners had been taken in the break-through and its exploitation—apart from the capitulation of half a million Belgians. *The Times* entitled this: "Wild German claims over prisoners."

On the 4th the French made a further but unsuccessful attempt to eject the Germans from their bridgeheads over the Somme. Previous attacks had been delivered on May 28 and 30. In these direct attacks on narrow and strongly defended positions the French Command, as became known later, used up most of their available tanks—including a large proportion of those in the British armoured division. This had been sent out to France too late to take part in the first phase of the campaign—where its value, for countering the enemy's mechanized sweep, might have been very considerable.

At dawn on the 5th a new German offensive was launched against the French. The opening moves were made against the western part, between Abbeville and Soissons, of the new front which the French had hastily improvised along the line of the Somme and thence to the Aisne. At nightfall, a French military spokesman stated that in general the attack had been checked, although tanks had filtered through at a few points. He also said that the enemy's main thrust was being made towards Compiègne, at the eastern end of this 120-mile

The Knock-Out—of France

sector, while a secondary thrust was being delivered from the German bridgehead at Amiens.

Next morning I wrote the following article :

"THE NEW OFFENSIVE"

(June 6)

THE opening of the fresh German offensive yesterday morning has brought on a renewed test, even more crucial than the last, before the dust of battle in the north has settled. It was a very speedy fulfilment of the prediction that the Germans were likely to turn south for "a follow-through stroke," against the line that the French had hastily formed from the mouth of the Somme to the Aisne, before attempting any stroke in an entirely new direction.

An obvious reason for the German choice is that it is dictated by the most constantly profitable of military maxims—to follow up an initial success by pressing as hard as possible on any portion of the opposing forces which has already been forced to retreat.

That maxim, coined for the pursuit, was successfully translated by the Germans, during the last year of the last war, into the sphere of the attack. Instead of trying to maintain an even front of advance, and to carry by storm the defenders' strong points, their new tactics were to follow the line of least resistance. This method carried the promise not only of turning the flank of the posts or sectors where resistance was firm, but of outstripping the intervention of the enemy's resources. In their offensive last month, the Germans gave this method a further extension. While Allied forces were ineffectively counter-attacking the defensive flanks which the enemy formed as he advanced, the German armoured divisions raced on through the corridor—to cut the Allies' communications.

Since it was the French Army which suffered most, both in loss and disorganization, from this armoured inrush, the German command may reckon that it is ripe for a further

The Current of War

shaking. Also, that the French air force is less formidable. In any case, now that the bulk of the B.E.F. has been safely evacuated, the French Army is the more accessible. France, too, is more immediately exposed to the distracting effect of Italy's threatened intervention. And the fact that the British forces have lost most of their equipment naturally prompts the enemy to attempt a knock-out blow against the French before the British forces evacuated from Dunkirk can be re-equipped and sent back to reinforce the new French front in the south.

Many people are asking how the German Army has been able to mount a second great offensive so soon after the first. In the last war the preparation of offensives took several weeks or even months—in concentrating masses of artillery, accumulating sufficient shells, organizing communications, and moving up reserves. But these were for offensives against a deep and strongly entrenched front. And the French have hardly had time to construct such a defensive system along their newly knit front, which stretches from the mouth of the Somme to link up with the western end of the Maginot Line.

Moreover, the Germans are now relying less on weight of artillery than on the mobile power of dive-bombers and tanks. These can be switched to a new area, with much greater ease and swiftness than the older instruments of the offensive. It is probable that while the German mechanized and motorized forces were sweeping north-westward towards the Channel ports—like a line of beaters, to drive the Allies' northern armies back against the guns of the German infantry divisions advancing through Belgium—the larger part of their infantry divisions were marching south, assisted by lorry convoys, to form up on the Somme-Aisne line. Thus they had time to get ready for the new attack, and also get some rest, while the campaign in the north was being finished.

A longer pause might have enabled completer prepara-

The Knock-Out—of France

tion, while it would have been desirable to give the tank crews a chance to recover from their exertions, and overhaul their machines. But it would also have allowed the French more time to reorganize their dispositions and consolidate the new defensive front. On balance, the German command was probably wise to strike, again, at the first possible moment. As Napoleon said : " Ask me for anything but time."

It is still too early to gauge the probable direction of their main effort. They may be hoping to carry out the unfulfilled 1914 plan by sweeping down the coast, and across the Seine between Havre and Paris, thus driving a strategic wedge between France and Britain. At the same time, their aim may well be dependent on the degree of progress made at the various points. Thanks to the manoeuvrability of the new-style forces on which they primarily count, they can more easily apply the principle of " variability "—through exploiting a choice of alternative objectives.

It is too soon, also, to estimate the prospects. These depend on too many uncertain factors. The first of these is the comparative degree of exhaustion, in proportion to the initial strength, of the opposing air forces. Hardly less important is the extent to which the German mechanized forces have been depleted in achieving the striking success which accompanied their original irruption. Can they repeat it in face of a defence which, this time, has not been taken by surprise? It is dubious whether the mass of the enemy's infantry is capable of achieving much without the penetrative mobility of his armoured forces.

The technique which these are applying seems to be following the lines long ago advocated by British military " futurists " (as they were called) and developed in detail in 1934 by our first modern tank brigade under Brigadier Hobart—lines which were viewed with scepticism by our authorities at the time. It has been left to the Germans, unfortunately, to prove how practical they were. One of

The Current of War

the ironies, and tragedies, of the present situation is that the mechanized warfare experts of the British Army have never been given due scope. And such ideas were slower still to make headway in the French Army.

Hence their comparative lack of armoured divisions with which to counter the Germans' sudden break-through—the kind of counterstroke which might well have nipped danger in the bud. The capacity of the French forces for delaying action may also have suffered from the inelasticity of their tactical methods since the last war. It is a common mistake to regard them as defensively trained—rather have they concentrated until recently on a complex and deliberate technique of attack and counter-attack, with massive artillery support, in the 1918 style. Such a technique was liable to be thrown out of gear, in open country, by an enemy's mobile thrusts.

But the French have a natural mobility which should quickly reassert itself, once the bonds of their old doctrine are relaxed. No nation is so inherently elastic, especially in the military sphere. Here lies a promise of capacity to devise a new counter-technique, at short notice.

On the night of the 6th the French said that they had again succeeded in maintaining their positions, although as a result of a marked increase of enemy pressure on the Lower Somme "a slight withdrawal of our advanced elements took place" [the withdrawal here was actually to the line of the Bresle]. They estimated that the Germans had thrown more than 2000 tanks into the battle that day. It was also made known that British troops [actually the 51st (Highland) division] were holding a sector near the mouth of the Somme.

General Weygand cautiously described the situation as "assez bonne." Much emphasis was given in the papers to the effectiveness of his methods of anti-tank defence. In a proclamation to the troops on the 5th he had declared: "The order is to defend our positions without thought of retirement." It was said that this implied that the idea of elastic defence had been given up in favour of rigid resistance on the spot

The Knock-Out—of France

irrespective of whether enemy tanks had infiltrated beyond it. Press reports were very eulogistic about what they described as a "new trick" of allowing the German tanks to penetrate deeply through the front, and then cutting them off from their supporting infantry and supplies of petrol.

Further changes in the French Cabinet were announced. M. Daladier was now definitely excluded from it. M. Reynaud himself took over the Foreign Office as well as the War Office; M. Baudouin was appointed to assist him in the former office, and General de Gaulle, the advocate of mechanized warfare, in the latter office.

On the 7th the German offensive was intensified. The French estimated that it was being delivered by 40 divisions, and that 1000 tanks had been employed in the Péronne sector alone. They remarked that the German use of dive-bombers had much diminished, while the tanks were operating in smaller groups. The Germans stated that operations were progressing "according to plan," with special emphasis in the south-west, and claimed to have pierced the Weygand Line on the whole front. In official circles in London and Paris the view was strongly held that the south-westward drive from the Somme was only a feint—in preparation for a main stroke either near the hinge of the Maginot Line or to outflank the Swiss end of it. [According to a French semi-official narrative of events, issued at Vichy in November, General Weygand advised the French Government on the 7th that they would be wise to seek an armistice without delay—in the hope of saving Paris and forestalling Italy's entry into the war.]

On the 8th the French admitted that a detachment of 200 to 300 German tanks had penetrated about a dozen miles behind their front in the extreme west, and on the previous night had been in the neighbourhood of Forges-les-Eaux, on the road from Amiens to Rouen, but it was explained that this force consisted purely of tanks, and that there was no sign of supporting infantry. French troops had at once moved in behind it and made "all the necessary dispositions" to isolate and round up the tanks. The French military spokesman remarked that the fate of this detachment "promenading behind our lines" was inescapable. More attention was given to the danger threatened by a heavy German attack that morning along most of the 60-mile front between Aumale

The Current of War

and Noyon, whereof it was reported that the German infantry divisions, which had been in the rear hitherto, had now entered the battle. It was estimated that more than 20 infantry divisions had been thrown in to back up the 7 armoured divisions already engaged. In the Soissons area, where German infantry had been mainly engaged, the intervention of armoured units had led to the French being forced back, and the enemy had gained "a considerable footing on the heights south of the Aisne."

On Sunday the 9th the German offensive was extended eastwards as far as Montmédy, at the western end of the Maginot Line. Weygand issued an Order of the Day, saying :

"The offensive has now been launched along the whole front from the sea to Montmédy. It will extend to-morrow as far as Switzerland, and the order remains for everyone to fight without thought of retirement, looking forward from where he is placed by the Command." "The enemy has suffered considerable losses. He will soon be at the limit of his effort. We are at the last quarter-hour. Hold firm."

There was to be no strategic withdrawal as in 1914. Then, the French armies had retreated fast and far, yet had been able to recover and turn about when the German armies became disorganized by their rapid pursuit. Now, in 1940, the French armies were ordered to fight every foot of the ground. They were to stand and be broken, rather than bend. If theory dictated this rigidity, it would have been difficult to carry out a better alternative in view of the strategic geography of France, the low ratio of force to space on their side in this recent phase, and, above all, their lack of mechanized equipment.

On the evening of the 10th Mussolini announced in Rome that Italy had declared war on Britain and France—"the plutocratic and reactionary democracies of the West, who have hindered the advance and often threatened the existence even of the Italian people." "Our conscience is absolutely tranquil." "A nation is not really great if it does not regard its undertakings as sacred and if it recoils from those supreme trials which decide the course of history." "This gigantic struggle is only a phase of the logical development of our revolution. . . . it is the struggle of peoples ; of the fruitful and young peoples against the sterile peoples on the threshold of their

The Knock-Out—of France

decline. It is the struggle between two centuries and two ideas."

News from the French front that night was scanty. Even the Germans merely spoke vaguely of great successes having already been obtained ; they said that French counter-attacks had failed, and that at several points the battle had " become a rout."

On the 11th I dealt broadly with the situation in the following article :

" THE GERMAN TIN-OPENER "

(June 11)

Mussolini's declaration of war has coincided with the most critical stage of the battle in France. It may well have been prompted by the measure of success that the Germans have attained, especially on the French left flank west of Paris.

As in the original offensive, the German command has applied the strategy of operating on a wide front, to cause distraction by threatening many points, while concentrating their punch on a very narrow sector where a soft spot was found. That " punch," both in its nature and in its action, has corresponded to the tin-opening steel instrument rather than to the boxer's fist. The obvious change of analogy illustrates the essential difference between old-style and new-style warfare. Once again the enemy's armoured forces, numerically a small fraction of his total strength, seem to have proved even more effective as a strategic lever than as the means of tactical penetration—of the front.

This time there was no surprise in the timing of the offensive, and the French were fully expectant of it, but the enemy managed to create something of a surprise-effect through the mobility and variability of his instrument. To repeat a phrase which once frequently used years ago in arguing for the mechanization of our Army : " Tank-time

The Current of War

is the right time for marching to a decisive spot. And it is the only rate of manœuvre which has the promise of gaining a decision in modern war." Happily, that promise is still unfulfilled in the bigger sense, whatever the proofs of its effect on the issue of recent battles.

On the opening day of the present offensive, last Wednesday, the German pressure seemed heaviest on the upper Somme and farther east, yet without being disturbingly strong. This fact helped to give rise to an impression among some who were well-placed to judge, that it was a prelude to a greater, and main, thrust against the hinge of the Maginot Line. Another ground for such an inference was that the enemy's communications here would be short and easy compared with those through the recent battle-area in Artois and Picardy; but full account may not have been taken of the previous location of the German armoured divisions or their smaller requirements in supply compared with infantry divisions.

On Wednesday night, the Germans made a strong push southwards in the dark from their bridge-heads on the lower Somme. Thus to their previous development of the possibilities of the "armoured attack" was now added that of the "masked attack"—under cover of natural obscurity. And then in turn they again exploited the former instrument.

On Friday night, apparently, part of an armoured division succeeded in making a narrow but deep penetration southwest of Amiens, to reach and cut the Paris-Dieppe railway at Forges-les-Eaux. French official sources referred to the inroad as no more than an incident—though they may have taken it more seriously than appeared; but it was implied that there would be little difficulty in isolating and hunting down these "stray tanks."

Events belied the hope. The mobile intruders may have profited by the fact that, from Forges-les-Eaux, they could operate in radiating lines that offered a choice of alternative objectives—Havre, Rouen, and its neighbouring bridges

The Knock-Out—of France

over the Seine, or the rear flank of the French forces covering Paris. This may have helped to create uncertainty. And meantime, the insertion of the steel tin-openers here and at other points had been followed up by a general advance of the German infantry divisions, extending the pressure-front still farther east than hitherto. The battle now spreads over a front of more than 200 miles—between the sea and the Argonne.

The Germans appear now to have reached and occupied the north bank of the Seine along a fairly wide front. One immediate effect is to close the last remaining main route of normal communication between this country and France. While this is, obviously, a hindrance to time-saving emergency reinforcement, the western ports of France have always been regarded as the natural military route for troops and supplies, under modern conditions of war. The Germans' advance to the Seine tends to confirm the view advanced in last Friday's article that they were probably hoping to carry out the unfulfilled plan of Count Schlieffen's conception. Much ink has been spilt and grief poured out, in Germany, that in 1914 this plan was abandoned, by permitting General von Kluck's army on the would-be decisive right wing to swing in eastwards before Paris was reached—thereby exposing their flank to the French counterstroke on the Marne.

Apart from the inherent strategic advantage of "going wide"—to stretch and distract the opposing army—the Germans have a tendency to semi-mystical repetition of great events or ideas in their past. An understanding of this habit might well have served the French as a special warning to take additional precautions, last month, on the Sedan sector. And the "Schlieffen Plan" has almost as great an appeal to the German imagination, as a symbol of "what might have been" if only the conception of Schlieffen's genius had not been watered down in execution by the second Moltke—whose choice to direct the invasion of 1914

The Current of War

had largely been made, by the Kaiser, because he bore the same name as the victor of Sedan in 1870.

It remains to be seen how much farther the German sweep past the western flank of Paris can be carried. Much depends on whether the French can maintain their hold on the south bank of the Seine. Also, on the progress of their advance from the Aisne, threatening a double envelopment. But a measure of reassurance may be found in the general experience that the momentum of almost every offensive in recent times has tended to a gradual diminution and ultimate stagnation ; together with the very recent example of the way our forces in the north succeeded in slipping out of the enemy's encircling grip.

The issue may turn on the extent to which the invader's armoured forces have been used up and his infantry masses exhausted—by fatigue as well as losses—in the past week of intense struggle. After such a struggle as this, the scales of the battle, and of the war, may hang on a balance of knife-edge narrowness. Moreover, the way that the German right wing has pushed forward, far in advance of the line as a whole, inevitably makes the invaders susceptible, as in 1914, to a flank counterstroke—this time from the centre leftwards, instead of from the outer flank towards the centre. The practical possibilities of such a riposte may depend not so much on the continued vigour of the French troops, as on whether the French have sufficient available tanks to make the required deep punch.

The French Government had already moved from Paris to Tours. It was preceded and followed by an immense flood of refugees. The French communiqué of the 11th ominously said that attempts by the enemy to advance *beyond* the Seine were checked. The German communiqué said that at several points they had cut off and surrounded strong French forces, and that "the enemy's power of resistance is visibly decreasing." But Weygand's anticipation that they would extend their attack to the Maginot Line had not been fulfilled. That

The Knock-Out—of France

heavily fortified front remained as quiet as it had been through the past month of operations. It was clear that the Germans preferred manoeuvre to frontal assault, even when this had become so much less hazardous through the absorption and shrinking of the French reserves.

.

Mr. Churchill, Mr. Eden, and General Sir John Dill, the new Chief of the Imperial General Staff, flew to Tours for discussions with the French leaders on the 11th, returning on the 12th. [It is now known that, on the 12th, Weygand again urged the necessity of an immediate armistice, in order to avert the complete destruction of the French Army. The French Cabinet, however, rejected his advice, and remained intent on continued resistance.]

.

On the 12th the German communiqué stated that their forces had reached the Marne on a wide front [Weygand had eventually ordered a general withdrawal of the French forces behind this historic river]. Farther east, the Germans had captured Reims [the French said that two further armoured divisions had appeared, and carried out the thrust, in this direction]. Compiègne, "the scene of the humiliating armistice dictated in 1918," was in German hands. So was Rouen, and the Seine had been crossed at several points between that city and Paris. Later, that night, the Germans announced the capitulation of an isolated force of 26,000 men which they had surrounded at St. Valéry, on the coast near the mouth of the Somme [this force included a large part of the 51st division].

On the 13th the French spoke of the delivery of numerous counter-attacks, especially one north of Paris which, they claimed, had advanced five miles. The Germans conveyed that these counter-attacks had merely played into their hands in accelerating the French recoil. They announced that, pressing on past Reims, they had taken Châlons-sur-Marne, the great French training camp. Also that they had taken 100,000 prisoners since the new offensive began on June 5.

.

On the 14th the Germans occupied Paris—the French troops having been withdrawn to the south. Havre was also

The Current of War

captured, having been isolated for several days. The French communiqué stated that : " Our fighting and our movements are taking place in the greatest order." The Germans said that the whole of the French line between the sea and the Maginot Line had broken. Also, that the central thrust of their mechanized forces had reached St. Dizier, over 30 miles beyond Châlons. They were now well round and behind the western end of the Maginot Line, and, in their eastward drive, were approaching the Langres plateau, the hill-rampart covering the Rhône valley.

Next day this mechanized thrust reached Chaumont, 40 miles to the south-east, the headquarters of the American Army in the last war. On the 16th, after crossing the plateau, it descended into the Rhône valley, and cut across it to Gray—a further 60 miles. The Germans also stated that a sector of the Maginot Line " has been penetrated." [They had waited until, as became known later, the French had denuded this line of its garrison, and were attempting to break out to the south with the bulk of their forces in that area.]

That day I wrote the following article :

" WE MUST KEEP OUR HEADS—AND USE THEM "

(June 16)

With the enforced abandonment of Paris and the enemy's passage of the Seine, both on the east and the west, it is difficult to see any natural defence-line which the French can take up other than the Loire. Their right wing, along the Maginot Line, was left projecting far in advance of this line, holding the entry into the huge corridor formed by the valley of the Saône—which joins the Rhône at Lyons. The left flank of this corridor is covered by a chain of hills which stretch southward from the fortress of Toul, between the Meuse and Moselle, to the famous Côte-d'Or of Burgundy.

The strategic reason for holding on to such strong barriers as the Maginot Line and the Vosges mountains is obvious, even apart from its importance in other respects. A retirement involves not only the abandonment of Alsace-Lorraine but the strongest part—by nature and by fortification—of the French front ; while forfeiting the only air bases which

The Knock-Out—of France

are still within close reach of German territory. But the length of such a line would be double that of the original French frontier, from near Basle to Dunkirk, while its double right-angle shape would make it all the more awkward for defence.

The problem has become all the greater because of the heavy losses in men and equipment which the French have suffered. The larger the ratio of space to the defenders' strength, the more scope there is, always, for manœuvre. And the Germans now profit by the advantage of operating from a central position. That might not matter if the French possessed a superiority in mechanized force, but unfortunately the balance of such force is heavily on the German side. Already, by their rapid advance towards Chaumont, the German mobile forces had threatened the communications, and possible lines of retreat, of the French right wing in Lorraine and Alsace. Now, by reaching Gray, they are astride all the railways except the most easterly through Besançon to Belfort.

At such a critical moment, it would be unwise to speculate on the further course of operations. It may be more profitable to discuss some of the more important lessons of the past month's campaign—not least for their bearing on the problem of home defence. One point that has been made clear by trained military observers of the campaign is that the number of parachutists whom the Germans dropped has been vastly exaggerated. And it would seem that even among the actual "drops" there were many more straw dummies than real men. Likewise, the number and scale of the armoured penetrations into the Allies' back areas were often small compared with what report and rumour conveyed. Too often, a handful of machines achieved altogether disproportionate results in spreading confusion and dislocation.

The outstanding lesson from recent experience is that the physical effect of the new German methods of attack—the

The Current of War

"rear attack" in varied forms—is greatly amplified by their psychological effect. Even the much-advertised "Fifth Column" has its most potent effect through creating a huge and widespread "Sixth Column." This is formed of the people whose fevered imaginations fill the country behind the battle-front with phantom parachutists, spies, and Fifth Columnists—in the ratio of hundreds imagined to one of reality.

It is wise to keep a sharp look-out for possible parachutists, and an alert mind for other enemy agents—real Fifth Columnists, for example, are likely to take the precaution of wearing a mask of ultra-patriotic sentiment. But it is equally wise to preserve a critical mind towards the stories of those who talk of "seeing," or "hearing," or "knowing of" such activities. The state of war-hysteria which transforms rumours and suspicions into facts, and multiplies them, is more dangerous than many thousand actual agents of the enemy.

The first need of the moment is to keep our heads. The second, to use our heads. These requirements apply not only to the method of dealing with the immediate emergency, but to the direction of our war-effort in general. It is good that the crisis has produced an overdue awakening to the vital importance of the time-factor in modern war. Acceleration of output at home is as essential as an acceleration of movement in the field. At the same time the impulse to make up lost ground should not lead us to forget the importance of staying power. A sudden spurt loses more than it gains if it is made in a flurry. Cool thinking must be combined with quick thinking.

It is natural that at this critical moment there should be a spontaneous general urge to "do something." It is often most manifest in those who failed to foresee the need for timely and adequate preparation—adapted to the conditions with which we are now faced. But this urge may morely pile up impedimenta unless wisely directed and controlled.

The Knock-Out—of France

Modern war has limited room for the unqualified. There is a danger that the shock caused by the success of the enemy's novel and skilful exploitation of "qualitative warfare" may produce a quantitative response of a badly gauged kind. The only quantitative factor that counts nowadays is quantity of quality.

Yet cries are arising in this country for a modern "*Levée en masse*." That emergency measure was effective, if not efficient, when applied by the French Revolution to meet the pedantic and slow-moving regular armies of the time. It had little effect when attempted again by the French, in 1870, after the defeat of their active forces at Sedan and Metz. It would have infinitely less promise in the present days of mechanized warfare. Those who clamour for calling out all the nation's man-power, irrespective of the equipment and instructors for training them, do not show a due realization of the fact that the French had at least five million trained men fit for service—yet have found it hard to withstand an invasion by a better-equipped army the shaft of which may number something approaching two million men, while its decisive spearhead consists of no more than a few score thousand "specialists" mounted in tanks and aircraft.

Skill is now the gauge of strength both in the factory and in the field—as our air force have been so superbly showing. If it urgently needs an increase of quantity, this would mean little unless the quality—of crews and machines—were maintained.

Similar conditions tend to govern the war on the ground. It was significant that M. Reynaud should recently have emphasized "clear-thinking" as the important task of the moment. For it was he who, nearly three years ago, published a pamphlet which argued that the principle of conscription no longer sufficed to meet "the exigencies of modern evolution," and advocated the creation of an armoured corps of manœuvre, on a voluntary and profes-

The Current of War

sional basis, consisting of 100,000 highly trained specialists in mechanized warfare. France would have less cause for anxiety to-day if his proposal had been promptly put into operation. Or if this country had concentrated its military effort on providing such a modern balancing factor, as it was so well fitted to do owing to its industrial resources.

In dealing with the situation that has arisen, our prospects may depend not so much on the urge to "do something," as on "doing the right thing."

With the Air Force, recent experience suggests an immediate concentration of effort, first, on the development of our fighter strength; secondly, on the production of bomber types suitable for co-operation with ground forces. There is also a need for closer liaison arrangements between air and ground forces. With the Army, the most urgent need is the greater development of mobile forces, especially of an armoured kind. As regards the new Local Defence Volunteers, their effectiveness may depend on whether their training is concentrated on essentials. To spend time in drill, or in bayonet-fighting practice—as some recent photographs have shown—is a time-wasting anachronism. The first requirement is to teach them how to observe; the second, how to report what they observe; the third, how to create obstruction to the enemy's movement; the fourth, to shoot. After these elements have been learnt, they should be taught guerrilla tactics—on Lawrence of Arabia lines. The most suitable material for the purpose may be found among former Boy Scouts, or poachers.

On the morning of the 17th it was reported that the French Cabinet had met at Bordeaux to consider President Roosevelt's answer to M. Reynaud's appeal for aid. An authoritative statement issued in London referred to "baseless and ill-informed rumours of peace proposals and peace negotiations." While declaring Britain's determination "to continue the struggle until victory has been won," it was, significantly,

The Knock-Out—of France

less definite in this part about the French than in its references to "the tremendous resources of the British and French Empires."

.

Before this statement was read by the British public, France had surrendered. On the night of Sunday, June 16—the anniversary of Quatre Bras—M. Reynaud had been succeeded by Marshal Pétain, who had sent out orders to the French armies to cease fighting. [This order was superfluous in the case of most of the field troops, who were in a state of exhaustion and partial dissolution ; but considerable elements of the fortress troops continued to resist for some days, until convinced of the authenticity of the order.] On the morning of the 17th the new head of the French Government sent a message asking Hitler "to seek with him the means for putting an end to hostilities." At 4.30 p.m. it was announced from Berlin that Hitler would confer with Mussolini ; and later, that Mussolini had left Rome on his way to Hitler.

Their meeting took place at Munich on June 18—the anniversary of Waterloo. Conversations lasted from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Subsequently, the French Government was instructed to send two plenipotentiaries to receive Hitler's terms for an armistice.

That day the German advance continued. Mobile forces occupied Cherbourg, as well as Rennes in Brittany. The Loire was crossed at several places. Nancy was gained, following the occupation of Metz. Another mobile force was approaching Lyons. But the German communiqué stated that : "The enemy is still continuing his resistance in the Maginot Line."

That night the first German air attack on England was delivered, chiefly against aerodromes in the eastern counties. British air attacks on objectives in Germany had continued.

On the morning of the 20th the French envoys flew from Bordeaux to receive the German terms. These were delivered to them next day by Hitler—in the same railway coach in the forest of Compiègne wherein Marshal Foch had delivered the Allies' armistice terms to the German envoys on November 11, 1918.

Under these terms the Germans were to occupy the whole of the northern half of France, from Tours to the Swiss border near Geneva, and a wide belt down the west coast of the

The Current of War

southern half. They would have the right to demand the surrender of all weapons in the unoccupied part. Hostilities were to cease six hours after the French Government had signed a separate armistice with Italy.

On the 22nd the French Government accepted Hitler's terms. The previous day, an Italian offensive had opened against the French Alpine frontier, on the thirteenth day of Italy's participation in the war. The French did not seem to realize that it was an offensive, for their first communiqué about it said : " In the Alps the Italians unsuccessfully attempted a few local attacks." The attacks were subsequently extended.

A German communiqué stated that the encircled French armies in Alsace-Lorraine had now capitulated ; and that over 500,000 prisoners, including three army commanders, had fallen into German hands. It said, however, that resistance was still being offered in sectors of the Maginot Line.

On the 23rd the French envoys arrived in Rome to negotiate an armistice, which was signed the following evening.

Hostilities finally ceased at 1.35 a.m. [by Italian summer time] on the 25th. By that time the Italian offensive had only succeeded in penetrating to Mentone, the holiday resort just across the frontier. In the last hours before fighting ceased, the French had recaptured the western half of the town.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CLOSE-QUARTER THREAT TO BRITAIN

With the capitulation of France, the threat of invasion came closer to this country than it had for more than a century—and now the geographical proximity of the coastline of France was intensified by the development of air power.

The direct threat of invasion gave rise to the following article—which dealt broadly with the technical problem.

“ IF HITLER TRIES AN INVASION ”

(July 2)

ONCE the Germans occupied the northern coast of France, an invasion of this country became a serious possibility—not so much because their troops now have a much shorter sea-crossing to make, but because the basic modern handicap on any such attempt has been partially removed. That handicap lies in the fact that an invading force which is carried over a long stretch of sea is excessively vulnerable to the defender's shore-based air force unless and until it can establish aerodromes on the far side.

On several occasions last autumn there was considerable concern here over reports that the Germans might attempt a crossing of the North Sea. It was difficult to see justification for such anxiety, in view of the inherent air handicap on its success. And this spring our own experience in Norway tended to confirm the views of those who had held that a sea-borne expeditionary force could not be expected to consolidate a foothold in face of a strong shore-based air force.

The situation has been changed, however, by the German

The Current of War

occupation of Belgium and France. Their air force may now be able to operate from bases close enough to the English coast to enable them not only to cover a crossing, but to give sustained support, at comparatively short range, to any troops who succeed in landing on our shores. At the same time there may be a better chance of slipping other forces ashore at more distant points—in the north, the south-west, or Ireland—if the defender's attention and forces can be fixed in the most obviously threatened area. It would be reasonable to anticipate that any attempted invasion will not be confined to one area, but will be carried out at a number of widely separated points—in order to create a distraction helpful to the chances of each and all.

If any attempt at invasion will run heavy risks, it may now seem a strategically justifiable gamble to a man who is playing for high stakes. All the more so, if he feels that he has some fresh tactical card up his sleeve.

The question which we must try to answer, both speculatively and practically, is what technique of invasion the enemy may practice. The kind of "Trojan horse"—composed of seemingly innocent merchant ships—which paralysed the resistance of Norway has no scope here. For the parachutists who spread confusion in the May offensive we are better prepared than were the Low Countries. Indeed, we have carried some precautions so far as to court the opposite danger—of creating hindrances to the free movement of our own forces, and piling up restrictions on the public which may be enervating to morale.

While it is important to have a counter ready for the devices which the enemy has already tried, it is even more important to look ahead. One of the obvious possibilities which calls for consideration is the use of gas ; it is to be presumed that the authorities are satisfied with their measures to meet this menace. Another is the use of artificial fog on a large scale, to cloak the crossing and to cover the landing from air attack. In any case we should

The Close-quarter Threat to Britain

be wise to reckon with the likelihood that the Germans, for the execution of their plans, may seize a moment when a sea-fog prevails in the Channel and the North Sea.

Other possibilities are the invader's use of air-borne tanks, and, still more, of swimming tanks. The former kind have apparently been utilized by the Russians in accelerating their advance into Bessarabia, and it is only reasonable to take account of the possibility that the Germans, who had already borrowed the idea of parachute troops from that source, may also have developed the means of transporting armoured fighting vehicles by air. But, as the weight-carrying capacity of aircraft is limited, such tanks could only be of the lightest type—which is not well suited for operations in such a hedge-bound country as England.

There would seem to be a greater potential menace in the use of swimming or floating tanks—a type in which this country originally took the lead, only to let it slip. Apart from the specially designed Carden-Loyd amphibian, which the Russians subsequently copied, we produced the means of floating somewhat heavier types so that they could “paddle” ashore after being dropped overboard from a transport. Some ten years ago a successful demonstration was given off the south coast, despite the fact that on the chosen day the sea was fairly rough. Unfortunately, this development languished when the mechanized warfare expert who had nursed it from birth was moved from the War Office to command an infantry brigade. If it had only been brought to maturity it might have been invaluable to us in the recent Norwegian campaign.

The German offensive in France has shown that our opponents have carried through to their logical fulfilment most of the ideas on mechanized warfare which were first conceived in this country. Thus there would be no cause for surprise if their next move should reveal that they have produced the means of giving reality to a picture painted by British military futurists years ago—of a fleet of transports

The Current of War

arriving on an enemy's coast and belching forth a swarm of armoured reptiles, which, after making their way ashore, could carry out a rapid advance inland. An alternative possibility is the transport of the tanks in sea-going barges, from which they could land, in shallow water, by means of a sloping ramp.

In any case we must be prepared for a marked acceleration in the *tempo* of any such attempted landing operations. Instead of the cautious consolidation of a "bridgehead," allowing time for the defenders' reserves to assemble, successive waves of armoured fighting vehicles may try to sweep inland as fast and as far as possible in order to create confusion and dislocate communications. On the other hand, there is a known limit to the number of places along our coast where such a mechanized landing is practicable, so that an appropriate distribution of our anti-tank weapons and obstacles is made easier. Moreover, we have men who, from long study of the idea, are well fitted to counter the threat, if only we utilize them adequately.

The menace of tank infiltration, as of the tank itself, lies largely in its psychological effect. And this effect is least where there is most understanding of its qualities. As the facts of the campaign in France become clearer, the evidence grows that at many times and places a mere trickle of tanks was magnified into the proportions of a tidal wave, thus producing needless abandonment of important points—sometimes only because it was not realized that the tanks themselves were lost.

In a subsequent article I discussed the same question from the point of view of strategic geography.

"THE DEFENCE OF THE WEST—FROM THE WEST" (July 11)

Since the menace of a rearmed Germany first became recognized, our attention has mainly been given to the

The Close-quarter Threat to Britain

"Defence of the West" against attack coming from the east. There is still a tendency to view our military problem in this light. It would be wise to take full account of the potentialities of attack from the west—in its varied forms.

In the last war, strategic geography provided us with a very important advantage both in exerting economic pressure and in meeting the chief weapon with which Germany could threaten us—the submarine blockade. This country lay like a huge breakwater across the North Sea approaches to German and German-occupied ports. In order to attack our shipping, the U-boats had to get outside the breakwater, through narrow and closely watched outlets, before they could operate against our main arteries of supply. According to the evidence of U-boat officers, the nerve-strain of that voyage of exit and re-entry did even more than the actual losses suffered towards blunting the edge of the under-sea weapon.

In this war, we enjoyed the same advantage in countering Germany's original submarine offensive. But an erosion of that strategic position came with the enemy's seizure of Norway. It nullified the possibility of repeating the 1918 measure of "barricading" the top of the North Sea with a minefield stretching right across to the Norwegian coastline. Hence the obvious reason for the new minefield laid from the Orkneys to Iceland and thence to Greenland—like a gate swung back on its hinges to shut off entry into the North Atlantic.

With the collapse of France, and the occupation of her entire western coastline by the Germans, the latter have in a sense reversed the former geographical position and achieved a strategic envelopment of the British Isles. It remains to be seen how far the enemy can utilize this new position. Its potential aid to the development of their counter-blockade is plain to see. In so far as their submarines can emerge into the Atlantic, there will no longer be need for them to make a hazardous periodical return to their home

The Current of War

bases. They can operate from bases close to the sea-approaches to our own western ports. Their bombers and mine-laying aircraft can do likewise. It is thus on the retention of a tactical, and no longer a strategical, advantage that we must depend—on the power of our fighters, anti-aircraft guns, and anti-submarine weapons, to intercept or beat off the direct attacks which are delivered.

Beyond this comes the question of invasion itself. Our frontiers may seem almost as much outflanked as were those of Czecho-Slovakia in September, 1938, and of Poland in September, 1939—but between our front line and a would-be invader's jumping-off position lies a great sea-moat. This adds immeasurably to the strength of a defence which in numbers, spirit, and technical assets, is very formidable. If some modern inventions have increased the prospects of an invasion, the general balance would seem to be more heavily against its success under modern conditions than it has ever been. The Navy, which threatens to interrupt an invader's passage, is no longer at the mercy of an adverse wind or a calm as it was in the days of sail. There were no mines to bar Napoleon's prospective way. There were no such means of observing or detecting a sea-borne approach as exist to-day. There was nothing comparable with the defensive advantage bestowed by a shore-based air force wherever the attacker is unable to secure or establish air bases on the opposite shore, or to operate across a relatively narrow strip of water. And behind this lies an army much stronger and more mobile than anything which could have opposed Napoleon's *Grande Armée*, if it had succeeded in landing here.

A consideration of these and other drawbacks may give Hitler pause over attempting an invasion until he has had time to develop his plans for an air and submarine counter-blockade of our western approaches, and to see how far this is successful not only in its direct effect, but in diverting our naval and aircraft resources to combat it. Any such pause

The Close-quarter Threat to Britain

might also give him a chance of doing what he can to repair the damage that was done to the western ports of France before they were abandoned, and making them fit for use as operational bases.

None the less, the possibility of an early venture should not be underrated. Nor its potentialities. Landings in Eire and in the west of England might be attempted both as diversions in aid of the more generally expected move against the east and south-east coast, and as a means towards tightening the counter-blockade—to which they could most powerfully contribute, if they were by any chance to succeed. Hitler has so repeatedly exploited the strategy of indirect approach that we should be all the more on guard lest the obvious practical arguments for a more direct crossing should obscure the alternatives.

The vulnerability of Eire is palpable. Her army is tiny in comparison with the immense length of her coastline, which offers a variety of inviting landing points. Until recently it mustered less than 10,000 men, and although this total has been much increased by the response to Mr. De Valera's call for volunteers a fortnight ago, time will be required both for training and equipment. Fortunately, Eire's accessibility to sea-borne invasion is not comparable with that of Norway, to which her position has been compared in some quarters. It is hard to see any large-scale expeditionary force being able to reach Eire without interception by our Navy, while its maintenance there would be still more precarious. The possibility remains that small forces might be slipped ashore or flown thither in troop-carrying aircraft. And that they might find sufficient support among discontented elements to enable them to have an effect disproportionate to their numbers, both in spreading confusion and defying ejection. In fulfilling that purpose they would profit by the advantage of superior armament. While the military conquest of Eire would seem difficult to achieve without greater resources than could be

The Current of War

dispatched by these methods—especially in view of the Irish talent for guerrilla warfare—the seizure of footholds might suffice for the establishment of air bases. And from these an air campaign could be waged not only against Britain's shipping routes, but towards breaking the will to resistance of the Irish people.

An alternative, or additional, possibility that deserves consideration is an attempt to invade the south-west of England. It is worth recalling that the last, and only successful, invasion of England in modern times was made at Torbay (in 1688), and was much helped by the fact that James II and his advisers had a natural expectation that the invading force, since it came from Dutch ports, would attempt to land on the east coast. That same area would offer many strategic advantages nowadays. It provides the essential elements of a secure "bridgehead," and the opportunity of extending it eastwards to create a strategic barricade behind which air bases might be established on English soil, dominating both the English Channel and the Bristol Channel. Happily, there are signs that the military authorities are now taking due precautions to foil any such move.

It seemed clear that any invasion, or air blockade, would be preceded by an attempt to gain command of the air over the English Channel. On August 11, after eight weeks' desultory air-raiding, mainly at night, the Germans launched a series of massed attacks in daylight on convoys passing up the Channel. On the succeeding days, the enemy's attacks were extended inland, and directed more against aerodromes. Their losses increased disproportionately. On the 15th, out of forces which at times amounted to over a thousand machines, they were reported to have lost 180, against 34 British fighters. They made another massive effort on the 18th. This day saw the definite defeat of the first great German effort. It was a victory for quality over quantity.

Therewith the Germans reverted increasingly to night raids. While these caused serious damage, they were not so acute a menace to Britain's general situation as the daylight "blitz."

PART VII
WAR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

CHAPTER XXIX

THE THREAT TO EGYPT

(August 3)

WILL Hitler attempt the invasion of Britain? Or will his next move be elsewhere—perhaps in the Mediterranean theatre? There are signs pointing both ways. And also divergent pronouncements on the enemy's part. After proclaiming the imminence of a direct attack on this island they are now suggesting that their intended method, actually in progress, is that of attrition through operating against our supplies and resources.

This new note may be bluff—to throw us off our guard. It may be true—to explain the necessity of trying to weaken us, by pressure at the extremities, before striking at the centre. In gauging Hitler's real intentions we may, when confronted with so many conflicting indications, find guidance in the normal trend of his technique.

He has constantly applied the strategy of indirect approach, both in his political and in his military operations. Even when at last he launched his offensive in the west, he did not follow the canons of orthodoxy by striking direct at "the main armed forces" of the French Army. Although he had amassed an immense superiority of mechanized force he made his opening moves in a different, and easier, direction. As regards the French, he applied the method of "the baited offensive"—which I described in various pre-war books as "the gambit of future warfare" that was likely to offer the most promise of overthrowing modern defence. The effect of his sudden pounce on the Low Countries was to make the French move out of their defences and push forward into

The Current of War

Belgium in massive strength, while incautiously leaving the hinge of their advance almost denuded. Whereupon a few German armoured divisions were able to pierce this weak spot and get an almost clear run across the rear of the Allied armies in Belgium, cutting their communications.

Far from "marching to the sound of the guns" in the traditional way, the modern German Command has marched away from it—both to find the line of least resistance and to throw the enemy off the scent. Instead of fulfilling the principle of concentration in the obvious and orthodox way, they have been careful to create the fullest possible distraction to the opponent's power of concentration against them. Only after thus paralysing his freedom of action, and dislocating his dispositions, have they made a concentrated effort to overthrow him.

It is possible that they may now reverse their method. After so many examples of the strategically indirect approach, they may think that a sudden direct assault would have a psychologically similar effect—that the obvious course would be the least expected. Even if they adopt this course, they may seek to create distraction prior to concentration, by attempts at different points.

It would be more in accord with their modern method, however, if they postponed invasion in favour of a new and wider indirect approach aimed at the sources of Britain's strength and her arteries of supply. They may hope that by cutting off her limbs, or at least slashing them, they might weaken the action of her heart.

If that should be their strategy, the Mediterranean is the likely operating theatre. And Egypt, with the Suez Canal, is most probably the limb that the German military surgeons are eyeing. It would be well to take full account of the risks. For we have certainly had a habit of underrating them.

The public is little aware of the degree of risk that we have complacently accepted in the recent past. (The article

The Threat to Egypt

then gave a summary of the facts of the past, similar to that which had been originally included, but finally omitted, from my article of March 2—see Chapter XX.)

Our forces in that theatre are now much stronger, if the proportion of mobile armoured units is inevitably, because of past short-sightedness, lower than could be desired. But there can be little doubt of the technical as well as the moral superiority they have established over the Italian forces facing Egypt's western frontier.

An important question now is whether the Italians are being reinforced by German air and mechanized units and what effect this might have.

Any attempt to advance in strength across the Western Desert would have to overcome immense natural difficulties,—above all, of water supply. The coastal route is the only one suitable for any considerable force of the orthodox type. And, besides offering a series of strong defensive positions, this is exposed to naval bombardment and concentrated air attack, while forces moving along it are confined by the lofty escarpment which in places runs within a couple of miles of the coast. It would be hard to find anywhere a more unpromising avenue of invasion.

South of it, in the interior, lies the vast desert expanse. It is a perfect barrier against the normal kind of force. But more danger might arise if an invader applied a new mechanized technique, adapted from that which the Germans employed in France, and had really up-to-date means of carrying it out. We must reckon with the possibility. A wide-fronted advance by well-dispersed mechanized units, acting on infiltration methods, would be much harder to check than any old-style column. The most effective answer would be the counter-manoœuvre of our own armoured forces. In such a mobile operation between modern "ships of the desert" much might depend on which side could bring into action the more powerful battle-tanks.

CHAPTER XXX

BEFORE THE CURTAIN RISES

(October 9)

Serious operations were slow to develop in the war between Italy and Britain. Hostilities opened on the morning after Italy's declaration of war, June 11—with Italian air-raids on Malta and British air-raids in Africa, followed that night by raids on Turin and Genoa. And a British armoured patrol promptly tweaked the nose of the Italian Command in Libya by capturing an outpost on the frontier. This was followed up by coups against the Italian frontier forts of Capuzzo and Amseat, while raiding became frequent on the frontiers of Italian East Africa. But the Italians, despite their great superiority in numbers, were slow to reply. Their first noteworthy move was on July 4, when mechanized and motorized troops attacked and occupied the frontier posts of Kassala and Gallabat in the Sudan. A naval encounter took place off the Libyan coast on July 9, but the Italians slipped away into the cover of shore defences before they could be closely engaged. On the night of July 14 the frontier post of British Moyale, on the frontier of Kenya, was evacuated after resisting Italian attacks for several days. The garrison retired to Buna, and the pursuers were driven off.

But it was not until August 4 that any strong move began on the Italians' part. It was directed against the least important, and weakest, of the British territories in the war zone. This move was the invasion of British Somaliland. On the 5th an Italian motorized column occupied Hargeisa, 30 miles over the frontier, while another took the coast town of Zeila, in the extreme north. After a short halt, they pushed on and the small British forces in that territory gradually fell back on Berbera, the capital. On the 19th these forces were evacuated by sea to Aden, leaving British Somaliland in Italian hands. If a barren gain materially, it had a "window-dressing" value for the Italians. And ten days later they had another small

Before the Curtain Rises

success of this kind, when the British withdrew from Buna, in Kenya.

At last, on September 13, the long-threatened Italian offensive from Libya began, when the Italians occupied Sollum. On the 17th they occupied Sidi Barrani. This was a considerable step on the road into Egypt—if it was also a jump into mid-desert. Preparations for a further bound were obviously in progress.

If our strength in Egypt had already improved, the danger we ran there was still serious—on any calculation of the scale of the opposing forces. Our stream of reinforcement thither was not yet in full development, while the possibilities of an early German reinforcement of the Italians, in air force particularly, was a risk that could not be lightly discounted. Furthermore, signs of German intervention in the Balkans were multiplying. On October 12 the arrival of German troops in Rumania was reported—from numerous places of strategic importance.

FOR the last three months the eyes of the British public have been fixed on their own shores and towns—by the threat of invasion and the actuality of air attack. At any moment now the curtain may rise on a new act, the setting of which lies in and around the Mediterranean.

It may prove even more dramatic, while testing our military capacity more severely, than the closer danger we have been confronting. For Hitler's progress has been far more striking when he has followed the strategy of indirect approach, than when, as recently, he has seemingly tried to fulfil his purpose by direct attack. The more difficulty he meets in trying to breach the walls of our "island fortress," the more likely that he will seek to weaken its resistance indirectly by attack on the outlying "forts," with a view to cutting out Imperial communications and undermining our world-position.

Potential developments at three corners of the Mediterranean may well have been prominent in the Prime Minister's mind when, after giving reasons for confidence

The Current of War

in our power to withstand a continuation of air attack or attempt at invasion, he uttered a warning note against any tendency to underrate "the awful hazards in which we stand."

No sober calculation of the strategic and quantitative factors would lead anyone who was capable of making it to take a light view of the Mediterranean situation, in any of its aspects. Indeed, only the combination of disregard for calculation and lack of imagination which is a British characteristic could have led us into the position of courting such risks. This attitude is an inestimable asset in meeting danger, but a handicap in forestalling it. In retrospect it is somewhat ironical to recall the optimistic delusions which were prevalent last winter about the "great Allied army" in the Middle East, which was supposed to be capable not merely of holding the Italians in check but of striking at Germany through the Balkans or depriving her of Russian oil supplies by occupying the Caucasian oilfields. Only after the collapse of France was the meagre strength of the French forces in Syria—the supposedly stronger part of the Middle East army—made known to the public here, though it was doubtless known all along to the enemy.

Yet it was impossible at the time to correct such delusions by a plain statement of facts, while even a cautionary note of realism was labelled pessimism or defeatism. It was worse still in France—in my own experience, any articles which suggested that it would be wise for the Allies to adjust their ends to their means were banned by the French censorship, even though they had been published here. As was remarked of the German leaders in the last war, there is nothing more dangerous than to give a people an exaggerated idea of its own strength.

That section of public opinion, including some of our supporters in America, which criticises our recent withdrawals in the Western Desert and on the Sudan frontier, thereby reveal their own failure, even yet, to grasp the

Before the Curtain Rises

broad realities of the situation. They prefer to hold opinions which thrive in a vacuum, sealed against the intrusion of awkward facts—such as the great preponderance of force which the enemy has enjoyed in all theatres since France fell out of the war. Those who call for a display of the offensive spirit without regard to whether the conditions of a successful offensive exist are more dangerous to a nation than any Fifth Column. They are the Varros who lead the way to Cannae. Unhappily, they have always more popular appeal than a Fabius Cunctator in the emotional atmosphere of wartime.¹

The fog of war is very thick at the eastern end of the Mediterranean—thicker, owing to current circumstances, than in any previous campaign. But on a sober reckoning of the probable balance of forces in that region our partial withdrawals would seem far less remarkable than the fact that so much caution and delay has been imposed on the enemy. Together with the course of such operations as have taken place, it would suggest a moral superiority on the part of our forces greater even than might have been expected, and capable of going further towards offsetting the enemy's numerical advantages.

It is hard to gauge how far the balance has been altered by recent reinforcements on either side. The capacity of the Axis for providing them is obviously much greater, while in regard to the air force the enemy has the advantage of being able to fly machines thither by a comparatively short hop. The intervention of German forces could do so much to tilt the scales that it is only reasonable to reckon

¹ On this score at least it is a pity that the educational system of a modern democracy gives less attention to the classics than did the education of the statesmen who had to face Napoleon's menace. For there is no more vivid warning of the dangers of uncalculating impetuosity than that contained in the story of how the Romans, growing impatient of the strategy by which Fabius "the Delayer" was gradually stemming the tide of Hannibal's advance, were so swayed by Varro's demagogic clamour for the offensive that they gave him the chance to try it against Hannibal. In this, he was less successful than in his platform attacks on Fabius—precipitately leading the Roman Army to the worst disaster in its history.

The Current of War

with the likelihood of such reinforcements—despite the reflection on the Italians' capacity. And our very measure of success in repelling the direct threat to this country may have the indirect effect of setting German forces free for diversion to the Mediterranean.

The relative scale of the air forces there is likely to be the most crucial military factor in the campaign. And next to it, the scale of the opposing mechanized units available for, and capable of, far-flung manoeuvre in the desert south of the main coastal route. While we must reckon with the invader having the larger *numbers* in each type of force, the operative margin of superiority would have to be very big before it might imperil our position—provided that our generalship is quick to foresee and counter flanking moves that might be attempted in various places.

Apart from the difficulty of estimating the actual balance of forces at the present moment, another important element of uncertainty is introduced by the fact that our base does not lie in our own territory. It is not easy to gauge the effect of possible enemy advances, coupled with that of air attacks, on the different sections of the Egyptian people.

While considering the imminent threat to Egypt we have also to take account of two further moves on the enemy's part—the German advance through the Balkans, which is already in progress, and the potential German line of operation through Spain.

The reported occupation of the Rumanian oilfields by German troops has a dual significance. Its immediate effect bears on the ultimate issue of the war, whereas the ultimate objective of this advance may carry a more immediate threat. In the first place, the step is doubtless intended to assure Germany's Rumanian source of oil supply—both against any British attempts to wreck the wells and against any Russian move to seize them. When the Russian forces reoccupied Bessarabia they were well placed, in the event of any friction with Germany, to forestall the latter's forces

Before the Curtain Rises

in any open race for the Rumanian oilfields—since a German invasion would have much further to travel, and also have the Carpathians to cross. Germany has now attained her object by permeation instead of invasion. And the U.S.S.R. would seem to have lost one of the most effective checks available to it in warding off any eventual German designs against the Ukraine. At the same time Germany's capacity to maintain the present war is naturally improved—since the precariousness of her oil supplies has been her basic weakness.

The further question raised by this move is whether it portends an imminent attempt to overawe Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey with a view to securing air bases in that area, and a passage into the Middle East for German air and mechanized forces. Even on the assumption that Turkey could be thus coerced, the inherent difficulties of such an operation would be very formidable, while its risks would be heavy if there were any possibility of Russian intervention. Nevertheless it would be wise not to discount the possibility—nor the influence that its shadow might have on the peoples of the Middle East. In that way, especially, it might have a convergent effect on the campaign in Egypt.

As for the danger at the western end of the Mediterranean—that Spain may enter the war, or at least be induced to facilitate the passage of German forces—this possibility likewise might have more effect in darkening the general picture, and in upsetting our Mediterranean communications, than in opening a new route of reinforcement for the immediate operations in Africa.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE INVASION OF GREECE

(October 29)

At 3 a.m. on October 29, after several days of ominous rumour, the Italian minister in Athens delivered an ultimatum to the Greek Prime Minister, General Metaxas, which gave the Greek Government three hours' grace to accept the Italian occupation of various strategic points in Greece. General Metaxas rejected this demand.

ONE more neutral country has been invaded. Once more the Axis Powers have moved along the "line of least resistance"—in their estimation—as a means towards pursuing the "strategy of indirect approach" against Britain. From their point of view, the subjugation of Greece offers both an accessible and an effective lever in loosening our position, not only in the Mediterranean, but in general.

How far their new move was precipitated by recent incautious suggestions published here, that we might take the initiative in that area, only history can tell—and then only if the historical evidence on the subject ever comes to light. Those who indulged in such suggestions might have taken warning by what happened in northern Europe. Our cause has suffered much, and so have the unfortunate neutrals, from a tendency to take the offensive in talk before we were adequately prepared to fulfil it in action. Let us hope that this time our capacity to fulfil our words has been carefully measured. Our performance in this new war zone may well have a far-reaching effect on the wider issues of the war.

The Invasion of Greece

A superficial view of the invasion of Greece might encourage the idea that it is of limited significance, since Greece is a long way from any of our vital points, and might be considered geographically as a "dead end." But such a view would be very superficial. To gauge its real significance, it is worth while to put ourselves in our opponents' shoes, and ask what they expect to gain by it.

From the standpoint of Fascist Italy, highly conscious of ancient history, it offers the prospect of renewing that domination over Greece which Rome achieved in the second century B.C. It also provides a chance of gaining more cover against naval or air attack by extending her strategic screen southward down the far side—which is none the less uncomfortably near—of the Adriatic and the Ionian Sea. There are potential economic advantages, too, which she doubtless has in mind.

From the wider standpoint of the Axis, and its offensive aims, the move opens a prospect of certain immediate advantages in its bearing upon the general war situation. It creates a new distraction to our power of concentration, in the Mediterranean, to meet the threatened attack on Egypt. Any immediate help—naval, military, or air—sent by us to Greece will have to be diverted from the forces available to cover Egypt. If that aid should not succeed in its purpose, the failure may react on the resolution of the Egyptian people—this is likely to be an Axis calculation. And any manifestation of our inability to fulfil our guarantee to Greece might have serious repercussions, damaging to our prestige, throughout the Near and Middle East. We have already suffered much from the way we distributed guarantees without sober calculation of the strategic factors. Hitler and Mussolini have shrewdly exploited these flaws—finding it easier than to strike where we are strong. They are well aware that most people are influenced by superficial impressions, and do not trouble to look deeper—into the conditioning factors and difficulties. Thus they prob-

The Current of War

ably hope that Greece will be regarded by other countries as a test case of our ability to check the eastward spread of Axis power—and have probably chosen to play that particular card from a belief that we shall not be able to trump it.

Modern conditions of war are unfavourable to the offensive in any conflict between Powers of more or less equal armament. But they are, unfortunately, very favourable to aggression wherever it is directed against a well-chosen target—such as a country of inferior-quality armament that lies some distance from powerful allies. For an aggressor alone can enjoy the full advantage of initial surprise. And even where this does not suffice, in conjunction with the first shock of air bombardment, to produce the collapse of the chosen victim, the aggressor may thereafter count on profiting by the modern axiom that “possession is nine points of the war.” He will be able to convert to his own advantage the inherent strength of modern defence in frustrating any later offensive by which his opponents attempt to throw him back.

In Greece, as elsewhere, much may depend on the developments of the opening days. The Greeks' chief asset lies in the wild mountainous belt of country which covers their northern frontier—if it is less formidable down the west coast route past Yanina than further east. Their chief danger lies in the vast superiority of the attacker's air force. Apart from the potential effect of this shock weapon they might well count on holding up the invader's advance through the mountain-belt. They can place in the field some 14–16 divisions; and even when allowance is made for the troops which must be reserved to cover the Bulgarian and Yugo-Slav frontiers, as well as the islands, there should be a balance available quite adequate, in numbers to check the Italian advance from Albania. For the Italian forces there are reported not to exceed 10–11 divisions, with one armoured and one Alpine division.

The Invasion of Greece

In conducting their advance, the Italians may benefit by local experience gained in the last war. For, from 1916 onwards, their forces occupied the area along the Greek-Albanian frontier—though facing the other way, to oppose the German and Austrian advance southward into Greece. During those years the Italians did much to open up that part of the country and develop its communications, building over 600 miles of roads where there had been only rough tracks.

Nevertheless, if the Greek troops show the same spirit which they did in 1918, when fighting with the British on the Macedonian front, they should give a good account of themselves in defending their hill-ramparts. A bigger question, inevitably, is what the Germans may do to help the Italian advance from Albania—either directly, by contributing bombers and dive-bombers, or indirectly, by initiating a fresh move from Bulgaria or Yugo-Slavia to threaten the Greeks' hold on Macedonia. There is obvious scope, so far as aerodrome facilities permit, for switching to this new scene of action a proportion of the German dive-bombers which played the leading rôle in France. As for the looming threat to the Greeks' eastern flank, although their Macedonian frontier is partially covered by a mountain chain, the shallowness of the long coastal strip makes it awkward to defend and sensitive to attack. A thrust from Bulgaria would only have to go 30-40 miles deep in order to reach the Aegean Sea, and the Greek ports along that coast would be within close bombing range.

This factor complicates the problem of sending troops to reinforce the Greeks in that area, apart from the question whether we could spare sufficient to bear comparison with the scale of the forces that the enemy might soon concentrate there with Bulgaria's aid.

More may be hoped from action, primarily naval, to forestall Italian attempts to occupy the Greek islands. And, subsequently, from the harassing of Italian communications

The Current of War

by forces operating from new advanced bases now made available to us. If the Italian advance into Greece can be checked, there may be an opportunity of developing aerodromes from which a sustained air campaign against Italy's war-resources could be waged, at much shorter range than has hitherto been possible.

On the night of November 11, the Fleet Air Arm delivered a stroke of far-reaching importance—to the indirect aid of the Greeks and the general improvement of the Mediterranean situation. This was an attack on the Italian naval base at Taranto in which two Italian battleships, and possible three, as well as two cruisers, were stated to have been seriously damaged.

The increased security of our naval position in the Mediterranean helped to ease the military position. By facilitating the passage of reinforcements to Egypt, it enabled General Wavell (the British Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East) to send help to the Greeks, principally in the form of air squadrons, without causing more than a temporary check in his plans to deal with the Italian invaders of the Western Desert.

CHAPTER XXXII

A VITAL TURN IN THE WAR

(October 31)

This was written for the *Sunday Dispatch*, appearing in the issue of November 3.

MORE and more the course of events has brought out, to British eyes, the parallel between Napoleon and Hitler. The ghost of the "Little Corporal" stalks over Europe in the guise of the "Austrian Corporal." For several months it has loomed threateningly on the Channel coast, pointing its arm towards the cliffs of Dover. And now, again repeating history, it seems to be moving eastward—towards the Pyramids.

In several ways the parallel becomes closer when more closely examined. In 1797, Napoleon Bonaparte's lightning strokes against the Austrian armies led Britain's main Continental ally to accept an armistice. And, by the subsequent Treaty of Campo Formio, Austria dropped out of the war, so that Britain was left to face the enemy alone. The very day after this treaty was signed, Napoleon wrote a letter to the French Foreign Minister urging that all activities should now be concentrated on destroying England—"Once this is done, Europe is at our feet." A week later he was appointed to command the forces which were optimistically christened "The Army of England."

But Napoleon as a young soldier had been brought up on the teachings of Pierre de Bourcet, the master-mind in French military thought during the eighteenth century. And Bourcet's leading principle was that strategy, to prove

The Current of War

effective, ought to be based on "a plan with branches"—a plan which could be adapted to alternative objectives. Explaining this principle, he had written :

"One should study the possible courses in the light of the obstacles that have to be overcome, of the inconveniences or advantages that would result from the fulfilment of each branch—and then decide as to which can lead to the greatest advantages, while employing diversions and all else one can to mislead the enemy and make him imagine that the main effort is coming at some other place. And in case all these diversions, counter-marches, or other ruses fail of their purpose—to hide the real aim—one must be ready to profit by a second or third branch of the plan, without giving the enemy time to consider it."

So Napoleon took care that his plan for the invasion of England had branches. One of his alternatives was to conquer the North Sea coast so as to shut off British trade with Central Europe. Another was to strike at British trade with the East by conquering Egypt. And this last was adopted when he came to the conclusion that the preparations were inadequate, and the conditions unpropitious, for an attempt to cross the Channel. (Seven years later, in 1805, when he massed his army on the cliffs near Boulogne for a new and greater attempt at invasion, he switched it into a march against Austria the moment his chance of a clear passage disappeared.)

On the first occasion Napoleon was undoubtedly keener from the outset to try the eastward, or indirect, stroke. For he had previously expressed the view that to destroy England, France must conquer Egypt. And even while he was moving troops towards the Channel, he was also making preparations for a possible Mediterranean move. Thus time was saved when the Egyptian branch of his plan was finally chosen. So well was secrecy maintained that, although the assembly of the shipping was known, the British Government was deceived as to its destination.

A Vital Turn in the War

And, eluding the British Fleet, Napoleon's expeditionary force landed in Egypt—only for his designs to be upset when, first, his fleet was destroyed by Nelson in the battle of the Nile, and then, his own march on Syria was baulked by Sir Sidney Smith's stubborn defence of Acre.

After nearly a century and a half, the wheel of history has come full circle. Once again a great military power, rising from a political revolution, bestrides the Continent—its career of conquest achieved by methods which have carried the principles that Bourcet taught Napoleon beyond the field of pure strategy into those of diplomacy and propaganda. Once again such a power turns its face alternately towards England and towards the Eastern Mediterranean. Once again, a hitherto irresistible land force feels the curb of naval power, and confronts the problem of overcoming it.

Yet for all the striking points of similarity, there are significant differences, not only in the military and political conditions of the problem, but in the sequence of events. Napoleon set out to conquer Egypt after defeating Britain's chief ally on the Continent, but before he had actually extended his grip over the north-western and south-western seaboard of Europe. Hitler has the advantage of already holding the whole coastline from the Arctic circle to the Pyrénées. He also has as an ally the strongest Mediterranean power, whose forces are, numerically, not very much smaller than his own. A further change is the new mobility of land power provided by mechanization. And the biggest difference of all is due to the advent of air power—which overrides the old barriers between sea power and land power.

It is but sober sense to recognise that the balance of these differences tends to the advantage of Hitler, as compared with Napoleon—and thus makes our task in checking his progress correspondingly more difficult.

We can, however, hope to benefit by certain of the developments in the technical conditions of warfare which

The Current of War

have taken place since Napoleon's time. Thus, at sea, the change from sail to steam has much improved the chances of intercepting any attempt to transport large land forces over the water in face of a superior naval power, since the operations of the latter are no longer dependent on the fickleness of the wind. Furthermore, a landing on a hostile coast has become infinitely more hazardous in face of a strong shore-based air force. And in the sphere of land operations, modern fire-power multiplies the strength of the defence wherever the defending forces have similar equipment to those of the attacker, and are supported by sufficient aircraft to prevent the attacker dominating the sky overhead, while themselves being capable of harassing his communications.

This last factor may partially explain what has been the most encouraging feature of the Middle East campaign hitherto—the remarkable caution of the Italian advance, despite the great superiority in numbers which they enjoyed in these theatres when they entered the war and France collapsed.

Our people would seem to have little idea of the risks we have run in that quarter during recent years.

In the autumn of 1937, I had an opportunity to put forward proposals for the reorganization of the Army to meet modern conditions. In emphasizing the urgent necessity for increasing the strength of our Middle East garrisons, I dwelt on the new risks of interference in the Mediterranean and the consequent difficulty of sending reinforcements through that sea *after* an emergency arose. For this reason, I urged that we ought "to locate part of the Imperial strategic reserve, as well as its sources of supply, in territory east of the Mediterranean." To this end, we ought to develop the military manufacturing resources of India, and also transform a considerable part of the British troops there into a modernly equipped force capable of reinforcing the Middle East. I pointed out that

A Vital Turn in the War

because of the far-stretched frontiers and vast desert tracts of Egypt and the Sudan, we ought to do more to exploit the possibilities of mechanization, since the best type of force for that region would be one largely composed of highly mobile mechanized units, rather than the customary infantry garrison. My detailed proposals were, in brief, that one armoured division and one motorized division should be provided in Egypt ; that a further armoured division should be maintained along the borders of Italian East Africa ; and that a third should be created in India, as a reinforcement for the Middle East—apart from any that could be spared from home. While these conclusions were accepted in principle, with some diminution, steps towards their achievement were painfully and perilously slow.

When the war came an armoured division had been formed in Egypt, but was by no means complete. There was also an infantry division, partly formed of battalions drawn from Palestine. And an Indian division had been brought thither, although it was only an infantry one. Further reinforcements arrived subsequently, notably the Anzac contingent. Nevertheless, at the time Italy entered the war, our forces in the Middle East were far outnumbered by those of the enemy, while their equipment left much to be desired—particularly in respect of aircraft and tanks.

In view of the imminent threat of invasion at home, and the time required to replace the vast quantity of equipment lost in France, it was inevitable that the strengthening of our forces in the Middle East should be a gradual process. In such circumstances the slowness with which the Italians moved was strange—if fortunate. For during the first two months they no more than made small encroachments on our Sudan and Kenya borders. No move of any importance developed until August, when they advanced into British Somaliland in strong force. If they had chosen to strike at our weakest point, it was also the one of least strategic importance. What they gained by that cheap triumph

The Current of War

was largely offset by the time we gained to strengthen more vital areas.

At last, on Friday, September 13, their forces in Libya crossed the frontier and occupied Sollum. It appeared that the long-expected advance on Egypt, across the Western Desert, had begun in earnest. Four days later they reached Sidi Barrani, nearly half-way to our rail-head and fortified camp at Mersa Matruh. They had covered nearly a quarter of the way to Alexandria. Exultantly the Italian radio, suggested that they would reach Alexandria in another three days. But after this 60-mile bound to Sidi Barrani they have stuck there ever since.

There are numerous reasons which excuse their delay. They need to improve the road from Sollum to Sidi Barrani. And between Sidi Barrani and Mersa Matruh there are nothing but desert tracks, while there is little water available. Their supply routes have been continuously harassed by our air, sea, and mechanized forces, and although they have an army of over a quarter of a million men in Libya, it is a difficult problem to use it as an effective army of invasion across the desert belt. The bigger the army that is pushed forward, the greater the risk of disaster if any rash move should lead to a breakdown of its supplies.

The route along the coast is alone suitable for the advance of any large forces of the customary pattern. This route itself is confined by the high escarpment which runs close to the coast, thus making it easier for the defenders to block, while it is at the same time exposed to naval, as well as air bombardment. For a would-be invader the prospect is extremely uncomfortable.

South of the coastal route lies the far-stretching desert, which offers no suitable routes for any large force of the normal kind. While it has possibilities for a mobile mechanized force, operating on a wide front, it offers similar scope for counter-manceuvre by a defender's mechanized forces—who enjoy the advantage of better

A Vital Turn in the War

knowledge of this desert expanse. Thus any mechanized advance across the desert would court the risk of repulse unless the attacker could count on a big superiority of mechanized force—and this, in such an area, would carry its own big risks of breakdown. Moreover, there is little reason to think that the Italians themselves have mechanized units capable of competing effectively with ours. And, according to recent information, no German armoured divisions have arrived on the scene.

Beyond all these weighty considerations lies the factor which must weigh most heavily of all on the mind of the Italian command in Libya—and, still more, in Italian East Africa—that of how the petrol supplies that would be used up in extensive operations can be replaced while our Navy maintains its power of interference.

“Slow but sure” may be the motto of the Italian command—but Hitler, as well as Mussolini, may well be thinking that while it is clearly slow, it is less clearly sure. Hence arises the obvious urge to create diversions elsewhere which may, at the least, help to draw off part of the British air, sea, and land forces which bar the road to Egypt.

It has not been easy, however, for the Axis leaders to find an alternative branch which would promise to have an immediate leverage on the British position in Egypt. Time and space combine to present an awkward problem. Egypt is a long way round from Europe by the route through the Balkans and Asia Minor even if Turkey did not stand in the path. And while the process of permeation and intimidation, applied to the countries between, may serve Germany's ultimate purpose, it is a slow way of solving the immediate problem of clearing the way for the invasion of Egypt. It may allow too much time for Britain's strength to grow, and for Italian petrol supplies to dwindle.

The occupation of Rumania may be of invaluable help towards improving Germany's own petrol supplies for a long war, apart from the emotional satisfaction it brings as

The Current of War

another stage in her long-cherished "March to the East"—but in itself it is only a little step towards the immediate aim.

Likewise the long-threatened move in the Western Mediterranean—a march through Spain against Gibraltar, and thence into North Africa—might do much to weaken our general position, but is another long way round as an avenue of immediate reinforcement to the move against Egypt.

These considerations may explain the decision to strike at Greece. Although it is a "dead end" in the geographical sense, an advance there might go much further in the strategic sense. If Greece were to be quickly subdued, and our incapacity to save her were thus demonstrated, the result might shake the confidence of all the peoples who are still inclined to resist the Axis—including the Egyptians themselves. At the same time, all the immediate help we sent Greece would have to be taken from the forces available to cover Egypt, thus improving the chances of the Italian advance there. By contrast, the forces which the Axis can employ against Greece are not a subtraction from their strength in Africa, which is inherently limited by the restricted capacity of Libya and Italian East Africa to support forces on their poor resources, especially when these territories are more or less isolated by British sea power. Another argument for the timely conquest of Greece is that it would deprive us of potential air and sea bases from which an offensive campaign against Italy might later be waged.

Calculations such as these may well have prompted the Italians' attack on Greece. It is to be hoped that the outcome may prove that they have miscalculated the measure of the resistance that can be offered there—and that the Greeks, with our assistance, may show them that they have "bitten off more than they can chew."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE GREEK COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

(November 27)

A MONTH has passed since Mussolini extended the war to the Balkans by his sudden stroke against Greece. From any comparison of the size of the two nations and their total forces it was natural to picture the Italian invasion as an attack by a big bully on a small boy. And the even greater disproportion between the two air forces gave still more cause for anxiety. On the other hand, it was reasonable to find ground for hope of Greece's effective defence in the difficulties of the battle-ground and its obvious unsuitability for a *blitzkrieg*. Also, in the fact that the actual strength of the Italian forces in Albania was no larger than what the Greeks might deploy against them if the invaders gained no decisive advantage in the opening days.

During the first month of war those hopes have been more than fulfilled. In the defence of their own mountain belt the Greeks fully equalled the highest anticipations, while they have been able to press their counter-offensive to an extent that few expected.

In checking the Italian advance from Albania, the Greeks benefited from nature's help. The scarcity of roads on that frontier and the bad weather favoured the defender at the expense of the invader. For these conditions restricted the use of tanks and the flow of supplies, thus giving the side that was weaker in modern weapon-power a better chance to block the routes that an invasion was bound to follow. These were limited to two—from the Argyrokastro area

The Current of War

towards Yanina, and from Koritza towards Florina. To ease their way the Italians tried to use their 3rd Alpini division for a cross-country thrust through the mountain-belt in the centre, towards Metsovo. But it was trapped in the Pindus gorges and thrown back in disorder, leaving many prisoners behind in the Greeks' hands.

At the same time the lightly equipped Greek mountain troops, familiar with the country, could make their way over mountain-tracks to harass the flanks and rear of the Italians' road-bound columns. This advantage also facilitated the initial stages of the Greek counter-offensive, enabling their troops to penetrate weakly guarded parts of the frontier and seize points on the lateral road which runs from Koritza south-westward through Leskoviku behind the Albanian border. It would seem clear that such counter-offensive infiltration forms the most effective lever that the Greeks have exerted. Its leverage has been strengthened by the increasing air pressure which the R.A.F. has developed on mountain defiles where the Italian columns and transport are particularly susceptible to dislocation.

As the Greeks press deeper into Albania there is, of course, a risk that they in turn will suffer from similar disadvantages. Indeed, one could not overlook the possibility that the Italians, finding it hard to force a passage through the Greek mountain-belt, might have craftily sought to open the way by luring the defenders forward into Albania, repulsing them there, and following up their recoil. That possibility was reduced when the Italian advanced base at Koritza was occupied, and would be further diminished by the occupation of Argyrocastro and Santa Quaranta. A more definite answer to such questions may be provided if the Italian morale should break under the strain of a hard-pressed and air-harassed retreat. With the reinforcements that have arrived, the Italians ought to be able to stem the tide ; but whether they will, is a matter of imponderables.

The Greek Counter-Offensive

The success the Greeks have attained, while a tribute to their own morale, is of wider significance in its reflection on the morale of the Italian troops—fighting, under hard conditions, for an aggressive cause which has no clear appeal to the spirit of sacrifice on which the will to conquer depends.

The lack of such will had already been suggested by the evidence of the campaign in Africa. On a comparison of the opposing forces there at the time Italy entered the war it might well have been expected that the Italians in Eritrea would overrun the Sudan and that those in Libya would develop a dangerous pressure against Egypt. In pallid contrast, they merely nibbled at the frontier posts of the Sudan and Kenya during June and July, and in August turned to the easy line of operations against British Somaliland. What they gained in prestige value by this "window-dressing" success was offset by the practical value to us of the time gained for strengthening our forces in the Middle East. And we could reckon that with each passing month the Italians' reserves of petrol would diminish. At last in mid-September the long-threatened advance from Libya began, but only to go as far as the desert post of Sidi Barrani—where it has since stayed. Even when full allowance is made for the manifold difficulties of supply in that almost waterless and roadless area, the impression is left that the Italians' tardiness has also come from a deficiency of confidence to grease the axle of the advance.

The striking success of the Greeks has given a sharper point to the impression gradually produced by the Italians' prolonged passivity in Africa. The effect on governmental and public opinion in other countries, especially those in the Near and Middle East, is already perceptible. And our naval air stroke at Taranto has underlined the fact that Italy is the weak end of the Axis. Whether we could have done more to exploit that weakness is uncertain; the problem has been more complicated, and our resources more strained, than many of our ardent offensive theorists

The Current of War

have ever realized. But we might have exploited the weakness more subtly.

Back in August, when the German air offensive on this country by massed day-time attacks had been so decisively shattered, it seemed to me that this result offered an opportunity of giving a new turn to our strategy. I suggested that we might find it profitable to suspend our night raids on Germany's industrial targets long enough to see whether the Germans would be inclined to discontinue theirs, which until then had been on a minor scale. Since we had much leeway to catch up, and thus the greater need of uninterrupted production, we had the more to gain from any tacit truce to raiding. And as we could not expect to force an early decision, it was desirable to conserve the energy of our people if we could do so in this way. Moreover, it would enable us to concentrate more effectively against Italy. I pointed out that nothing would be likely to "rattle" the Italians more than to feel that they were becoming the main target, and that the Germans were being left in comparative peace while they were being hammered. The quickest way to damp their ardour would be to transfer the brunt of the war in their direction.

This argument, however, did not appeal to the "bull-dog spirit." Those who were filled with it were apparently reluctant to make any change in the aim they had been pursuing for several months. As a natural result they stung the Germans to embark on massed night attacks on our cities. In retrospect, their judgment of the relative gain may seem questionable. And, meantime, we missed the chance of concentrating on the moral "soft spot" of the enemy combination.

Our people and their leaders have shown magnificent fighting spirit. But, as so often in the past, their instinct of pugnacity has been more marked than their sense of strategy—in the application of psychology. For the best effect, they need to fight not only with their hearts, but with their heads.

The Greek Counter-Offensive

While Italian morale is our most promising target in the present phase of the war, that aim must nevertheless be pursued with foresight and calculation. In backing up the Greeks we must keep in sight the possibility of a German flank move in that zone. In our air operations against the Italians we should continue to direct these where we may most effectively weaken their war-making capacity and make them weary of the war, while avoiding the kind of attack that might stiffen or embitter them—for example, such vandalism as the bombing of Rome. Finally, we must be watchful for any sudden crack in Italy itself, lest it should offer the Germans an opportunity for a swift descent from the Brenner to occupy the industrial north of Italy.

In the days that followed, the Greeks' erosion of the Italian position continued. Then came a fresh counterstroke—on the far side of the Mediterranean. The British in Egypt had by now been strongly reinforced from home, particularly in aircraft and tanks. On the night of December 7 the Desert Force under General O'Connor moved out from Mersa Matruh against the Italians' advanced position at Sidi Barrani. At dawn on the 9th the attack was launched. While Sidi Barrani was directly threatened by the infantry advance, a British armoured brigade slipped through a gap between the Italian posts to the southward and circled round astride the enemy's rear. This led to the virtual destruction of four Italian divisions, and the capture of over 35,000 prisoners.

Following up this success, the British mobile forces advanced across the Libyan frontier, mopping up the fortified posts there, and isolated Bardia. On January 3 its defences were penetrated by British tanks and Australian infantry, whereupon the resistance speedily collapsed. A further 40,000 Italians were here rounded up—at a cost of less than 600 casualties. A dominant factor throughout these operations was the way that the British air force had paralysed the Italian, superior in quantity but outclassed in quality. On January 22 the port of Tobruk was captured, with 25,000 prisoners. The British advance was then rapidly extended along the coast of Cyrenaica. Meantime, on the 18th, the British took the initiative in the Sudan, subsequently pressing deep into Eritrea and Abyssinia.

PART VIII
EPILOGUE—AND PROLOGUE

CHAPTER XXXIV

CAN WE TAKE THE OFFENSIVE IN 1941?

(January 7, 1941)

This was written for the *Daily Herald*, as one of their series on the "Twelve Riddles of 1941."

THE question might be answered simply with a "yes." But to answer it adequately we must begin by defining what we mean by "the offensive." No term connected with war has given rise to more misunderstanding, or to such perilous misunderstanding.

In the usual military sense "the offensive" is a term applied, and restricted, to action which takes the form of advancing upon the enemy. This is a convenient, but not a precise description—especially in modern conditions of war. While it suited the days when men fought with swords and spears, it does not altogether fit warfare which is carried out with fire-arms and other long-range missiles. A man, or a force, lying in a covered position may appear to have taken up a defensive attitude—yet his or its fire is operating offensively. The significance of this distinction is most simply illustrated in the case of a sniper, who always assumes the static posture that is associated with defence, whereas his purpose is essentially offensive. So is that of any feint or withdrawal which entices an opposing force to advance to a spot where it can be more effectively smitten by fire, or more easily upset by a threat to its self-exposed flank. And this is one of the most profitable gambits of the art of generalship.

The Current of War

In the wider sense, the offensive may be said to embrace any form of action designed to gain the initiative—in operating against the enemy's will to continue the war. Thus naval blockade is an offensive in the economic sphere; and so is such indirect action as buying up neutral supplies which the enemy might otherwise obtain. For the same reason, air attack on his industrial plants is just as truly a form of the offensive as the bombing of his aerodromes or troop concentrations. All propaganda that is aimed to weaken the will of the enemy people, as distinct from stiffening the will of your own, likewise constitutes an offensive—in the psychological sphere.

In all these ways we can certainly take the offensive in 1941—and, in most of them, with much greater force than hitherto. While waiting for the time when we might be strong enough to take the offensive in the military field we badly failed to develop the offensive possibilities that were open to us in other spheres. Indeed, the way that the leaders of France and Britain talked last winter of the victory they were going to win, when their strength had grown, was worse than foolish. It not merely exposed the weakness of their existing strength and prompted the enemy to forestall them, but tended to block the way for a psychological offensive.

To confine our idea of offensive to that of direct military assault is an absurdly narrow conception, while it shows a shallow understanding of modern warfare. Too many of our leaders, like those of France earlier, are still living mentally in the last century.

Unfortunately for the prospect of a broader conception, the collapse of France in face of the German *blitzkrieg*, after nine months of *sitzkrieg*, has produced a false picture of the power and virtue of the offensive in its superficial form. It has come to be regarded by public opinion in Britain and America as a universal solution for all war problems. This craze for "furious assault" is the craziest notion that has ever been born of unreasoning emotion.

Can We Take the Offensive in 1941?

Because a direct attack is obviously the most direct way to victory, instinctive pugnacity has often led to it being taken as the only way, regardless of whether the necessary conditions of success were assured—and thus it has too often proved the short cut to disaster.

The evidence of 1940, when analysed, provides little ground for the resurrected belief that, on land, attack can beat defence under anything like equal conditions.

The opening months saw the amazingly prolonged resistance of the Finns in face of a vastly stronger assailant. The impression and the lesson were obscured, however, by the shock of Hitler's victories in the west. But few people pause to reflect that Hitler was careful to wait, before striking at France, until he had a 4 to 1 superiority in tanks and aircraft. That was amply sufficient by any pre-war calculations to justify him in venturing an attack on the Maginot Line. Yet even then he did not take the risk. Instead, by his threat to the Low Countries he lured the French out of their weaker defences along the Belgian frontier, and then, when they, together with the British forces, had advanced deep into Belgium, struck in behind them at the weakest point of their line.

What the French Prime Minister described as "the incredible mistakes" of the French command—which were not incredible to anyone who had observed their long and obstinate adherence to the methods of the last war—smoothed the path for the Germans' new technique of mechanized infiltration: a technique which had originally been evolved by British experimenters more than ten years earlier. It was bad enough that the enemy should have been allowed to outstrip the Allies in developing these new means of attack, but it was even worse that the Allies should have failed to fulfil the much less exacting task of creating the appropriate counter-means. While attack was beyond their strength there was all the more reason, and urgency, for providing the modern necessities of successful defence. And

The Current of War

their neglect to do so was the inexcusable cause of the tragedy of May 1940.

This has brought more evil in its train—but not without some compensation. By fostering the delusion that attack could beat defence regardless of whether the conditions were favourable it may have prompted Mussolini to launch his invasion of Greece. This was bad in itself, but has changed the general situation for the better. By taking the offensive without due calculation, and in country unfavourable to his mechanized superiority, he gave the Greeks an opportunity to entrap his advancing columns in mountain defiles, and to follow up their recoil with a counter-offensive.

Likewise, on the southern side of the Mediterranean, it was the Italian advance across the desert to Sidi Barrani, and the accumulation of troops in that exposed spot where it was difficult to maintain their supplies, which gave the British the chance of striking a blow under far more favourable conditions than if they had taken the offensive initially. For they struck an opponent who was still strategically unbalanced after the jump which had landed him in mid-desert. Their offensive thus enjoyed the fundamental advantages of the counter-offensive—which is apt to be the most effective and easiest form of the offensive. For, as in ju-jitsu, it utilizes the opponent's own effort as the lever of his overthrow.

When considering the military prospects of 1941, as regards an offensive on our part, it would be wise to take account of this experience of 1940—that, except where the attacker had a tremendous superiority of force, all his successful offensives came as a sequel to the opponent making a false move which drew him out of position.

It is necessary, too, to face the fact that our army is much smaller than the German, and that even the utmost possible development of our man-power would not go far to bridge the gap. In the last war Britain and the Dominions together

Can We Take the Offensive in 1941?

eventually managed to place in the field about seventy divisions. We could hardly expect to provide as many in this war, however long it lasted—owing to the increased demands of the air force and of home defence, including anti-aircraft defence. Moreover, the total available for any campaign in Europe is diminished by the need in this war of guarding against a Japanese threat in the Far East and of dealing with the Italian forces in Africa.

Germany, in contrast, has no great navy and shipping fleet to maintain, nor any overseas empire to guard. And she is reported to have between 200 and 250 divisions raised and equipped—so that her present land strength is immensely larger than our potential strength. In so far as that strength lies in mechanized force her balance is also a big one.

Furthermore, no considerable force of the present type could be landed on the Continent without securing ports for the disembarkation of its heavier material and the maintenance of its supplies. And here we are faced with the fact that we have done our utmost to make these ports unusable. The more effective our bombardment has been the bigger the obstacle we must have raised to our own ultimate military aims. Perhaps it may be as well. For, however many German divisions are dispersed in occupying the conquered countries, it would seem probable that the Germans could soon concentrate sufficient to outweigh heavily any force that we could land. We do not want further Dunkirks.

It is often suggested that the enemy's superiority of land force might be discounted by our attainment of air superiority. But, apart from this being not yet in sight, his failure to overwhelm our army last May, despite his great superiority in both air and land strength, leaves a natural doubt about the value of such expectations.

In sum, our chance of invading the territory which Germany now occupies and winning a military victory there, would seem to depend on the possible discovery of

The Current of War

some revolutionary new weapons of paralysing effect or the creation of an army of radically new model. And neither of these possibilities is likely to be realized in 1941. Such a conclusion does not rule out the possibility of amphibious raids, and other strategic guerrilla operations.

Outside this area, the prospect of our taking the offensive militarily this year may turn on whether some fresh move on the enemy's part gives us the opportunity for an effective local counter-offensive. And in Africa, at least, the pure offensive should become increasingly practicable in proportion as Italian oil supplies dwindle and Italian morale declines. The combination of air and mechanized force on an increasing scale offers a definite solution of our military problem there and foreshadows the dissolution of Mussolini's African Empire.

Turning to the question of the air offensive against Germany, it has to be recognized that the prospective results of its continuation remain highly speculative. While a decisive effect is a possibility, the balance of probability is against such anticipations. In the light of experience hitherto, a bombing match between two sea-separated countries such as Germany and England is fundamentally a farcical contest—however tragic its spreading effects—unless one or other can cross the water, or gain a definite mastery of the air. For otherwise they can only scratch each other—until the cumulative effect of the scratches bring one of them to the point of collapse. As we are suffering more scratches than Germany, it is obvious that for some time we shall run the greater risk of exhaustion. And if we succeed in prolonging the game of "scratch-as-scratch-can" until Germany collapses, it is likely that we shall be almost as exhausted. Neither a good peace nor a quick recovery could be anticipated from such a condition.

Centuries of experience show that a victory obtained by a long-drawn attrition struggle is apt to be almost as

Can We Take the Offensive in 1941?

damaging to the victor as to the loser. For a genuine victory, the issue must be swiftly decided. The delivery of the decisive stroke or threat may have to be prepared by a lengthy period of manœuvring, involving widespread skirmishing—but no strategist worthy of the name should allow himself to be drawn into a slogging match or into a scratching match. The only protracted type of offensive that can prove profitable is a psychological one.

This truth was evidently appreciated by Lenin when he defined the principle that "the soundest strategy in war is to postpone operations until the moral disintegration of the enemy renders the delivery of the mortal blow both possible and easy." Hitler's grasp of it was implied in his remark, years ago, that the military problem which interested him was "how to achieve the moral breakdown of the enemy before the war has started." And his solution was shown in the "bloodless" campaigns against Austria and Czecho-Slovakia, and later in his actual campaigns in Scandinavia, the Low Countries, and France. Only when he came directly up against the British was he baffled.

But it is important to realize that Hitler's grasp of the principle was originally based on his knowledge of the German people's psychological weaknesses. Unfortunately, Britain's leaders have not yet shown an understanding of the principle, and have failed to exploit the psychological opportunity offered. It is all the more unfortunate because our resources in this sphere are superior to the enemy's.

There is a great opportunity, and an immediate one, for a psychological counter-offensive. In pursuing their military attacks the Nazis have weakened Germany's moral defences. Already, there is evidence that disillusionment has followed in the wake of conquest. The German troops, through being brought into contact with the people of the occupied countries, have been made aware of the feelings they inspire as invaders. Indefinite separation from home deepens the longing for home. Together with the sense of being friend-

The Current of War

less it opens the way for the infiltration of war-weariness—as well as of counter-ideas.

With a clearer conception of grand strategy, we should have a good chance of turning this disillusionment to advantage—for the salvation of civilization. We have helped to fortify the German people's war-will, and to check the spread of war-weariness, by the haziness of our peace-aims coupled with the definite way we talk about seeking a decisive military victory. This ominous combination naturally arouses the fear of a peace worse than Versailles, and thus plays into Hitler's hands. By clarifying our aims on this score we might go far to dispel such fears.

But to go farther still we need to develop a positive appeal that will convert the common people of Europe, including the German, into allies against Hitlerism. To carry conviction that appeal must be based on example, not merely on pious sentiments. We must create a new order in Britain, ready for extension abroad, that will be superior in nature and attraction to the Nazi order. We must give men a new vision, and a new hope. To beat the doctrine that the individual exists for the state it must be shown that we can evolve a scheme of national life in which the state of every individual is better than it could ever become in a totalitarian system. The new "free state" must secure its citizens all the benefits that the National-Socialist state promises them, together with the advantages that the latter, of its very nature, cannot even offer. In other words, our new order should combine a guarantee of economic security, based on the free provision to every one of the material necessities of life, with the largest possible measure of individual freedom outside the economic sphere.

The fulfilment of such a conception is the necessary spear-head of our psychological counter-offensive.

Index

A

Aachen, 304
Aandalsnes, 270, 272, 273, 279, 285,
287, 289, 290
Abbeville, 323, 325, 326, 327, 336,
340
Abu Klea, 70
Abyssinia, 137, 187-9, 236, 395
Achilles, 55, 58, 66
Acrc, 385
Aden, 372
Admiralty, 242, 256, 333
Adowa, 189
Adrianople, battle of, 65
Adriatic Sea, 379
Aegean Sea, 381
Africa, 121, 377, 393, 403, 404
Air co-operation with tanks, 34, 37,
41, 44, 107, 121, 189, 320, 324,
326, 342, 356, 404
Air forces, 90, 118, 124, 129, 159,
168, 180, 181, 195 *et seq.*, 295, 376
Air power, 21, 22, 32, 35 *et seq.*, 59,
60, 62, 107, 118, 124, 129, 132,
154, 155, 159, 160, 166, 168, 189,
207, 235, 252, 274, 277, 291, 295,
300, 307, 327, 337, 364, 376, 382,
385, 387, 403-4
Air raid precautions, 125, 131, 212,
307
Airship, 21, 26
Air transport, 21, 27, 41, 303, 361-5
Aisne, the river, 314, 322, 335, 339
et seq.
Albania, 380 *et seq.*, 390
Albert Canal, 300, 302, 304, 308,
337
Albert, King, 309
Alexandria, 388
Alps, the, 358
Alsace-Lorraine, 352, 353, 358
Alvdal, 280
American Civil War, 93
Amery, L. S., 197
Amiens, 197, 323, 324, 325, 327, 331,
335, 345, 348
Amot, 273
Amseat, fort of, 372

Andersen, Hans, 216
Andrews, Roy Chapman, 103
Anti-aircraft defence, 123-5, 130-1,
194, 283, 307
Anti-tank defence, 38, 39, 64, 72,
120, 125, 194, 209, 317, 362
Antwerp, 209, 304, 305, 309, 312,
318
Arbela, battle of, 66
Arctic Circle, 385
Ardennes, the, 209, 303, 305, 306,
309, 310, 314, 329
Argonne, the, 349
Argyrokastro, 391, 392
Armada, the, 191
Armoured carrier, 44, 103, 105, 109,
110
Army Council, the, 172, 177
Army organization, 41, 43 *et seq.*, 76,
77, 81, 84, 88, 104-5, 109, 121,
239, 240, 319, 321, 355, 387
Army Quarterly, the, 15
Arnhem, 303
Arras, 324, 325, 326, 330, 331
Artillery, 27, 31-2, 35-6, 38, 39, 41,
44, 72, 73, 74, 86, 104, 105, 165,
167, 184, 189, 194, 327, 338, 342
Artois, 348
Asia Minor, 389
Atlantic Ocean, 363
Audacity, 251, 254, 257, 259, 265,
267, 274, 282-8
Aumale, 345
Australian forces, 237
Austria, 124, 127, 381, 383, 405
Automatic (light), 27, 28, 29, 33
Avesnes, 318

B

Badoglio, Marshal, 189
Baku, oil-wells, 242
Balkans, 241, 373, 374, 388, 390
Baltic Sea, 249
Bardia, 395
Barry, Gerald, 247
Basle, 353

Index

Battice, fort of, 330
 Batum, 241
 Baudouin, M., 345
 Belfort, 353
 Belgian Luxembourg, 119, 209, 309,
 328, 337
 Belgium, 119, 207, 209, 299, 300,
 301 *et seq.*, 331-2, 370, 401
 Berbera, 372
 Bergen, 247, 252, 255 *et seq.*, 263
 Berkak, 288
 Besançon, 353
 Bessarabia, 361, 377
 Billotte, General, 115
 Birch, Lieut.-Gen. Sir Noel, 15
 Bismarck, Prince, 191, 260
 Black Sea, 20
 Bloch, M., 70, 93
 Blockade. *See* Economic Factors
 Blomberg, Field-Marshal von, 119
 Bombing, air, 124, 129, 143, 165,
 167, 184, 195 *et seq.*, 210, 236,
 257, 291, 295, 307, 327
 Bordeaux, 356 *et seq.*
 Bosphorus, the, 20
 Bothnia, Gulf of, 234
 Boulogne, 323, 326, 327, 330, 331,
 336
 Bourcet, Pierre de, 383, 385
 Brenner Pass, 395
 Bresle, the river, 344
 Bristol Channel, the, 366
 British Expeditionary Force, 82, 116,
 123, 204, 330, 336, 342
 British policy, 120, 132-3, 137 *et seq.*,
 154 *et seq.*, 402-6
 British Somaliland, 240, 372, 387,
 393
 Brussels, 305, 312, 314
 Buat, General, 81
 Buna, 372, 373
 Bulgaria, 377, 381

C

Cæsar, Julius, 48
 Calais, 323, 327, 330, 331
 Cambrai, 325, 330
 Cambrai, battle of, 1917, 97
 Cambrai-Peronne road, 322
 Campo Formio, treaty of, 383
 Cannæ, battle of, 375
 Caporetto, battle of, 1917, 96
 Capuzzo, fort, 372
 Carden-Loyd light tank, 101, 103,
 105
 Carden-Loyd amphibian, 361

Cardwell, Edward, 77, 172
 Cardwell system, 77, 110
 Carpathian mountains, 377
 Carthage, 56
 Carton de Wiart, Major-Gen. A., 270
 Cateau, Le, 318
 Caterpillar vehicles, 23 *et seq.*, 28, 30,
 41, 44
 Caucasian oilfields, 374
 Caucasus, the, 236
 Cavalry, 29, 30, 35-6, 44, 52, 65-6,
 98, 110, 113, 115, 159
 Censorship, 163, 217, 228, 237, 374
 Châlons-sur-Marne, 351
 Chamberlain, Neville, 139, 148, 180,
 247, 285, 289, 293, 301
 Channel ports, the, 123, 181, 322,
 327, 342
 Chasseurs Alpains, the, 254
 Chasseurs Ardennais, the, 309
 Chaumont, 352, 353
 Cherbourg, 357
 Churchill, Winston, 94, 255, 302, 313,
 318, 330, 332, 333, 334, 351, 373
 Citroen tractors, 23
 Civil conditions, 16, 34, 42, 46, 53,
 55, 58, 125, 127, 144, 159, 162,
 195 *et seq.*, 206, 211 *et seq.*, 264, 268
 Committee of Imperial Defence, 188,
 208
 Communications, 19 *et seq.*, 41, 63,
 66, 107, 120, 142, 143, 159, 224,
 230, 232, 234, 237, 239, 241, 249,
 252, 258, 269, 280, 285, 295, 319,
 327, 329, 336, 341, 348, 369, 370
 Communism, 229, 238
 Compiègne, 340, 351, 357
 Concentration, 19 *et seq.*, 120, 209,
 254, 295, 305, 347, 370, 379
 Conscription, effect of, 123, 139
 Co-operation, 19, 20, 28, 30
 Copenhagen, 249
 Corap, General, 324-5
 Corsica, 145
 Côte-d'Or, of Burgundy, 352
 Courtrai, 331
 Crecy, battle of, 48
 Cromwell, Oliver, 48
 Czecho-Slovakia, 137, 142, 143, 168,
 364, 405

D

Daily Herald, the, 399
Daily Telegraph, the, 83, 113
 Daladier, M., 314, 345
 Danton, Georges, 118, 251
 Danzig, 148, 155

Index

Dardanelles, the, 262
Defence of Britain, the, 80, 190, 196,
 203, 303
 Defensive, the, 75, 80, 119, 124, 125,
 132, 138, 166, 182 *et seq.*, 198, 204,
 209, 224, 228, 230, 238, 248, 250,
 263, 291, 310, 318, 329, 336, 338,
 344, 369, 380, 401
 Defensive-Offensive, the, 48, 121, 231,
 329, 338, 392, 402, 405
 Denmark, 199, 247, 248, 293, 294
 Derby, Lord, 332
 Destroyers, 124, 128, 253, 257, 266
 Devereil, Field-Marshal Sir Cyril, 177
 Dill, General Sir John, 351
 Dinant, 312, 313
 Disarmament, 166
 Disarmament Conference, the, 166,
 167
 Dombaas, 272, 273, 279, 280, 281,
 285, 287, 288
 Dordrecht, 302
 Dover, 383
 Drawbell, James, 171
 Drill, 80, 356
 Duff-Cooper, A., 113, 114
 Dundonald, Lord, 70
 Dunkirk, 323, 327, 331, 333, 334,
 336, 342, 353, 403
 Dutch Forces, 300, 301 *et seq.*
 Duval, General, 331
 Dyle, the river, 209, 309, 312, 314,
 315

E

Eben Emael, fort, 302, 304, 309
 Economic Factors, 56-8, 61, 147,
 156-7, 185, 192, 198, 207, 247,
 260-1, 265, 269, 278, 293, 295,
 328, 406
 Economy of force, 19, 20, 23 *et seq.*,
 198, 305, 321, 333, 339, 353
 Eden, Anthony, 333, 351
 Egersund, 264
 Egypt, 121, 122, 239, 370, 371, 376,
 377, 379, 384 *et seq.*
 Eire, 365
 Elasticity, principle of, 18, 28, 40,
 84, 87, 120, 177, 199, 279, 285,
 290, 310, 338, 343-4, 347, 348,
 384, 389
 Elverum, 252, 270, 272-3, 280
 English Channel, the, 199, 315, 328,
 361, 366
English Review, the, 92, 108
 Eritrea, 393, 395
 Estonia, 220

Evening Standard, the, 180, 186, 220,
 236
 Experiments, 49, 69, 77, 99, 100, 104,
 106, 114, 338, 361

F

Fabius Cunctator, 375
 Falls, Captain Cyril, 325
 Far East, 403
Field Service Regulations, 18, 49, 73,
 103
 Fifth Column, 354, 375
 Fighter aircraft, 124, 130, 325, 356
 Financial factors, 17, 32, 41, 43, 46,
 53, 76, 79, 82, 88, 102, 110, 111-15,
 122, 127
 Finland, 220 *et seq.*, 292, 405
 Finland, Gulf of, 220, 230
 Finnish White Book, 220, 221
 Flanders, 328, 330, 331, 333
 Fleet Air Arm, 255, 382
 Flexibility, principle of. *See*
 Elasticity
 Florina, 392
 Foch, Marshal, 70, 94, 357
 Forges-les-Baux, 345, 348
 France, 56, 82, 120, 122, 125, 146 *et*
seq., 152, 158 *et seq.*, 192, 197, 210,
 301, 306, 310 *et seq.*, 374, 381, 400,
 405
 Franco-Belgian frontier, 323
 Franco-German frontier, 160, 310,
 313, 323
 Franco, General, 187, 189
 Franco-German War, the, of 1870,
 86, 93
 Frederick the Great, 48
 French Air Force, 90, 129, 184, 193,
 206, 243, 342
 French Army, 49, 81, 82 *et seq.*, 104,
 118, 122, 158, 184, 193, 205 *et seq.*,
 209, 310 *et seq.*, 344
 French Revolution, 158, 255
 Fuller, Colonel (now Major-General)
 J. F. C., 19, 97, 338

G

Gallabat, 372
 Gallipoli, 262
 Gallivare ironfields, 252, 265, 278
 Gamelin, General, 118, 205, 206,
 209-10, 313, 314, 315, 319
 Gas, 34-7, 46, 87, 360
 Gaulle, General de, 91, 322, 345
 Gembloux, 312, 314
 Geneva, 357

Index

Geneva Convention, the, 167
 Genoa, 372
 Geographical factors, 61, 106, 127, 142, 159, 160, 182, 185, 187, 199, 205, 207, 209, 224, 230, 240, 242, 248-9, 253, 273, 289, 290, 300, 303, 329, 346, 359, 363, 381, 391
 Germany, 51, 56, 61, 71, 84, 87, 92, 108, 116, 126, 140, 142 *et seq.*
 German Air Force, 129, 181 *et seq.*, 205, 366
 German Army, 51, 65, 71, 75, 87, 104, 158, 186, 188, 193, 205 *et seq.*, 235-6, 291, 300, 302, 376, 381
 German Navy, 127-8, 255, 267, 295
 German-Soviet Pact, 137, 224
 Ghent, 330
 Gibraltar, 62, 390
 Giraud, General, 314, 325
 Givet, 312
 Gjøvik, 272
 Glomma, river, 273
 Goebbels, Dr., 214
 Gordon, John, 173, 195
 Gort, Lord, 177, 179
 Gothenberg, 252
 Goths, the, 65
 Gray, 352, 353
 Grebbe Line, 306
 Greece, 377 *et seq.*, 402
 Greek Islands, 381
 Greenland, 363
 Greenwood, Arthur, 148 *et seq.*
 Grenade, 27, 29
 Grong, 276, 277
 Grouard, Colonel, 70
 Gudbrandsdal, 272, 273, 276, 277, 279, 286, 288, 296
 Guise, 316

H

Haakon, King, 296
 Hague, the, 302, 325
 Haig, Lord, 52, 115
 Hailsham, Lord, 114
 Haldane, Lord, 172, 177
 Hamar, 252, 264, 270, 272, 273
 Hangö, port of, 220, 221
 Hankey, Lord, 94, 295
 Hannibal, 48, 56, 375
 Harstad, 262
 Hargeisa, 372
 Havre, 343, 348
 Hegre, 278
 Henderson, Colonel G. F., 114
 Highland division, the 51st, 344, 351
 Hindenburg Line, the, 97

Hinnøy, 261, 262
 Hipper, the, 255
 History, lessons of, 16, 42-3, 66, 98, 112, 174, 191, 201, 203, 208, 209, 210, 242
 Hitler, Adolf, 108, 126, 137, 145, 147, 161, 164, 167 *et seq.*, 197, 208, 210, 299, 307, 312, 357, 358, 364, 369, 373, 379, 385, 388, 401, 405, 406
 Hobart, Brigadier (now Major-General) P. C. S., 108, 338, 343
 Hogland, island of, 220, 221
 Holland, 199, 207, 299, 300 *et seq.*
 Hore-Belisha, Leslie, 121, 122, 171 *et seq.*, 337
 Horse. *See* Cavalry

I

Iceland, 363
 IJssel, the, 302, 303
 Imperial Military Forces, 15, 26, 42
 India, 74, 77, 78, 103, 105, 111, 121, 123, 237, 240
 Indian Army, 239
 Indian Mutiny, 239
 Indirect approach, the, 56, 107, 119, 120, 157, 162, 249, 253, 299, 305, 328-9, 337, 351, 369, 370, 373, 388, 394
 Infantry, 27, 35-6, 41, 44, 64, 73, 74, 76, 78, 80, 96, 107, 108, 121, 122, 240, 319, 326, 330, 333, 342-3
 Infiltration tactics, 75, 96, 101, 102, 253, 340-1, 362, 371, 392, 401
 Invasion, 20, 145, 235, 239, 249 *et seq.*, 359 *et seq.*, 386
 Invention, 16, 27, 114, 184, 191, 206, 364
 Ionian Sea, 379
 Iran, 241
 Iraq, 241
 Ireland, 360, 365
 Ironside, Field-Marshal Sir Edmund, 179, 205
 Italian Air Force, 129
 Italian Army, 189, 371, 373, 380 *et seq.*
 Italian East Africa, 121, 122, 144, 239, 373, 389, 390
 Italy, 128, 144-5, 166, 187, 189, 237, 339, 345, 346, 372, 387, 394, 395

J

James II, King, 366
 Japan, 128, 403

Index

Jerkinn, 280, 288
Joffre, Marshal, 70, 94
Jutland, 249, 252

K

Kaiser, the, 350
Karelian Isthmus, 220, 230
Kassala, 372
Kattegat, the, 247, 249, 260, 266
Kennedy, Major J. R., 186 *et seq.*
Kenya, 122, 240, 372, 387, 393
Kipling, Rudyard, 69
Kluck, General von, 349
Knollys, Colonel, 70
Kongsberg, 263
Kongsvinger, 263
Koppang, 277
Koritza, 392
Kristiansand, 264

L

Ladoga, lake, 230, 232
Lacrdal, 272
Landrecies, 316, 318
Langres, 352
Laon, 314, 322, 325
Latvia, 220
Lavanskari, island of, 220
Lawrence, T. E., of Arabia, 356
League of Nations, the, 59, 222
Lek, the, 303
Léman, General, 309
Lemnos, 262
Lenin, 405
Leningrad, 220, 230
Leopold, King, 331, 332, 334
Leskoviku, 392
Levanger, 276
Libya, 145, 239, 372, 373, 388 *et seq.*
Liège, 302, 303-4, 305, 306, 308-9, 312, 325, 330
Lj/8, 265
Lillehammer, 270, 272, 273, 277, 279
Limbourg, Dutch, 303
Lithuania, 220
Lixhe, 308-9
Lloyd George, David, 175
Local Defence Volunteers (Home Guard), 356
Lofoten Islands, 261, 262
Loire, the river, 352, 357
Loivisto, island of, 220
London, 143, 195, 199, 330, 345, 356
Lorraine, 316

Louvain, 309, 314
Low Countries, the, 299 *et seq.*, 401, 405
Ludendorff, General, 95
Lulea, 252, 278
Lyons, 352, 357
Lys, the, 325

M

Maastricht, 302, 303-4, 308-9
Macedonian front, 381
Machine-gun, the, 27, 33, 70 *et seq.*, 93, 165
MacMahon, Marshal, 335
Meginot Line, the, 119, 122, 194, 205, 310, 311, 313 *et seq.*, 330, 337, 342, 345 *et seq.*, 401
Mahdi, the, 70
Makins, Brig.-Gen. Sir Ernest, 113
Malta, 272
Mandel, M., 314
Mannerheim, Field-Marshal, 232
Mannerheim Line, 168, 221, 230, 232
Man-power, 33, 77, 78, 81, 82, 85, 86, 88, 112, 120, 153, 158, 184, 186, 188, 190, 193, 206, 214, 237, 321-2, 337, 355, 402-3
Manuals, military, 49, 50, 51, 81, 92, 99, 103
Marlborough, Duke of, 48
Marmora, sea of, 128
Marne, the river, 316, 349, 351
Martel, Major (now Major-General) G. le Q., 81, 101
Maubeuge, 314, 322
Maurois, André, 125
Mayer, Captain, 70
Maxse, General Sir Ivor, 96
Mechanized forces, 43, 52, 63, 64, 66, 77, 78, 82, 91, 97, 110, 115, 119, 159, 166, 177, 184, 188, 190, 193, 209, 210, 221, 222, 230, 240, 249, 304, 307, 310, 312, 314 *et seq.*, 329 *et seq.*, 340 *et seq.*, 350, 353, 371, 385-7, 389, 404
Mediterranean Sea, 20, 62, 239 *et seq.*, 289, 339, 369, 374, 375 *et seq.*, 395, 402
Menin, 331
Mentone, 358
Mercantile Marine, 20, 24, 128, 182
Mersa Matruh, 388, 395
Metaxas, General, 378
Metsovo, 392
Metz, 355, 357
Meuse, the river, 300, 303 *et seq.*, 316, 318, 324, 329, 337, 352

Index

Middle East, 122, 136 *et seq.*, 374, 377, 379, 386 *et seq.*, 393
 Milne, Field-Marshal Sir George, 99
 Minefields, sea, 247, 249, 252, 363
 Mines, land, 38
 Mjosa, lake, 272
 Mobility, 19 *et seq.*, 49, 51, 63, 65, 66, 69, 70, 79, 104, 210, 249, 250, 264, 268, 272, 274, 281-2, 287, 300, 316, 319, 329, 340-4, 347, 376, 385
 Moerdijk bridge, 306
 Moltke, the elder, 48, 249, 260
 Moltke, the younger, 349
 Mongol campaigns, 106
 Mongolia, 103
 Montgomery-Massingberd, Field-Marshal Sir Archibald, 115
 Montmédy, 346
 Montreuil-sur-Mer, 326
 Moore, Sir John, 48
 Mortar (light), 27, 33, 105
 Moselle, river, 352
 Motorized forces, 43, 74, 105, 123, 320, 326, 342
 Motor torpedo-boats, 124
 Moyale, British, 372
 Mudros, 262
 Munich, 124, 125, 132, 137, 357
 Murmansk, 221, 224, 230
 Mussolini, Benito, 155, 346, 347, 357, 379, 388, 391, 402, 404

N

Namsos, 261 *et seq.*, 273, 275, 276, 270-80, 289, 290
 Namur, 209, 303 *et seq.*, 330
 Napoleon, 43, 48, 56, 70, 71, 86, 93, 107, 118, 214, 215, 335, 343, 364, 375, 381 *et seq.*
 Napoleonic France, 191
 Narvik, 247, 250, 252, 255 *et seq.*, 271, 278, 283, 294
 Navy, the Royal, 40, 60 *et seq.*, 72, 145, 182, 247, 253 *et seq.*
 Nazi propaganda, 186, 190, 213, 214, 217
 Nelson, Lord, 385
News Chronicle, the, 247
 New Zealand, 237
 Nicholas, Grand Duke, 94
 Night operations, 26
 Nile, battle of the, 385
 Nivelle, General, 94
 North Sea, the, 261, 359, 361, 363, 384

Norway, 20, 225, 247 *et seq.*, 299 *et seq.*, 311, 327, 359, 365
 Noyon, 346

O

Object, and objective in war, 18, 54, 55, 60, 125, 140, 141, 145, 147, 201
 O'Connor, Lieut.-General R. N., 395
 Offensive, the, 18, 28, 34, 80, 82, 90, 119, 120, 124, 132, 138, 152-3, 156, 159, 162, 166, 167, 180, 182, 184, 186, 192, 194, 197-9, 202 *et seq.*, 208, 210, 225, 230, 238, 242-3, 248, 251, 293, 316, 318, 329, 378, 399 *et seq.*
 Official History, the, 188, 190, 207, 216
 Oise, the river, 314, 318
 Opdal, 388
 Organization, Army. *See* Army Organization.
 Orkdal, the, 281, 288
 Orkney Islands, the, 255, 363
 Oslo, 20, 250, 252, 258, 261, 264, 266, 269 *et seq.*, 284, 287, 288, 290, 294
 Oslo Fiord, 263
 Osterdal, the, 273, 277, 279, 280, 281, 286, 287, 288, 296
 Owen, Frank, 220

P

Paget, Major-General (now Lieut.-General) B. C. T., 270
 Paldaski, 220
 Palestine, 51, 239, 240, 387
 Panzer divisions, 324
 Parachute troops, 119, 120, 305, 325, 353, 361
 Paris, 56, 143, 314, 316, 326, 340, 343 *et seq.*
 Paris, son of Priam, 55
Paris, or the Future of War, 52 *et seq.*
 Paris-Dieppe railway, 348
 Parliament, 112-15, 130, 147 *et seq.*, 289, 330, 333, 334
 Passchendaele, 65, 152
 Peace aims, 141, 193, 217, 219, 405-6
 Peace proposals, 151, 155, 164
 Pétain, Marshal, 91, 314, 357
 Petrol, 115, 144, 300, 345, 389, 393, 404

Index

Petsamo, 221, 224, 231

Picardy, 348

Pindus Gorges, 392

Polish Corridor, the, 148, 155

Psychology, 138, 147, 153 *et seq.*, 257, 286, 311, 313, 317, 332, 354, 362, 374-5, 379, 392-3, 394

Psychological war, 156-7, 400 *et seq.*

Q

Qualitative Warfare, 321, 333, 334, 339, 347, 355

R

Railways, 20, 21, 32, 46, 63, 252, 263, 276, 305, 335

Reconnaissance, 20, 30

Red Army, the, 119, 223, 229, 361, 377

Reichenau, General von, 119

Reims, 351

Rena, 273

Rennes, 257

Renown, H.M.S., 255

Repington, Colonel, 174

Repola, 221

Research, 16, 48, 51, 100, 102

Rethel, 313

Reynaud, M., 91, 209, 210, 301, 312 *et seq.*, 319, 323, 326, 328, 331, 336, 345, 355, 357

Roads, 22, 63

Roadless movement, 25, 26, 44, 63, 74, 102, 103

Rodney, H.M.S., 255, 257, 260

Roman Army, the, 375

Rome, 42, 56, 65, 346, 357, 358, 395

Romsdal, 279, 287

Roosevelt, President, 356

Roros, 264, 280

Rotterdam, 302, 303, 305, 306

Rouen, 105, 345, 348

Royal Air Force, 111, 124, 129 *et seq.*

Royal Army Service Corps, 102

Royal Engineers Journal, the, 15

Royal United Service Institution, the, 15, 115

Ruhr, the, 56, 199

Rumania, 373, 389

Rumanian oil, 376 *et seq.*

Russia. *See* Soviet Union

Russo-Japanese War, 66, 71, 94

Rybach Peninsula, the, 221

S

Saar, the, 119

Salla, 231

Sambre, the, 314, 315, 316, 318
Sandhurst, the Royal Military College, 46, 47, 51

Sandys, Duncan, 178

Santa Quaranta, 392

Saône, the river, 352

Sardinia, 145

Saxe, Marshal, 107

Scandinavia, 164, 202, 206, 210, 235, 293, 405

Scapa, 255

Scarpe, the, 325

Scharnhorst, the, 255

Scheldt, the river, 318, 325, 330, 331

Schlieffen Plan, the, 316, 349

Science, 15, 16, 17, 27

Scientific Method, the, 17, 18, 43, 98, 126, 176, 182, 193, 198, 222, 229, 233

Scipio Africanus, 56

Sea-power, 20, 40, 60 *et seq.*, 72, 145, 161, 181-2, 225, 247, 249, 251, 253, 254, 256, 259, 266-7, 277, 284, 292, 364, 382-3, 390

Secrecy, 163, 168, 180, 228, 275, 384

Security, the principle of, 18, 124, 209, 219, 220, 249, 254, 265, 274

Sedan, 306, 310, 312, 313, 314, 316, 317, 324, 330, 335-6, 350, 355

Seine, the river, 343, 350 *et seq.*

Seiskari, island of, 220

Semois, the river, 310

Senegalese troops, 324

Sherman, General, 279

Shetland Islands, 199

Sicily, 62

Sidi Barrani, 373, 388, 393, 395, 402

Siege warfare, 37, 39, 41, 44, 45, 51, 66, 71

Siegfried Line, 125, 138, 160, 194, 205-6, 321

Sinclair, Sir Archibald, 149

Sitwell, General, 254

Skagerrak, 252, 259, 269, 282, 284, 287, 292, 294

Smith, Admiral Sir Sidney, 385

Smoke, 29, 32, 360

Snasavatn, lake, 275, 276

Sognefjord, 272

Soissons, 340, 346

Sollum, 388

Somme, battle of, 1916, 75, 322

Somme, the river, 316, 325, 327, 331, 335, 339 *et seq.*, 377

Index

Soviet Union, 119, 137, 144, 146, 147,
159 *et seq.*, 166, 168, 190, 207, 220
et seq., 233 *et seq.*, 238, 241
Spain, 128, 133, 137, 187, 376, 390
Spears, Brigadier-General E. L., 114
Speed. *See* Mobility
Stanley, Oliver, 171
St. Dizier, 352
St. Pol, 326
St. Quentin, 318, 322
St. Trond, 306
St. Valery-en-Caux, 351
Stavanger, 264, 266, 290
Steer, G. L., 292
Steinkjer, 275, 276, 278, 281, 290
Stockholm, 252, 270, 292
Stoeren, 262, 273, 277, 279, 280, 281,
285, 287-8
Stopford, General, 254
Storlien, 262
Strategy, 16, 17, 19 *et seq.*, 58, 60, 63,
66, 104, 106, 122, 137, 142, 146,
159, 160, 162, 197, 201, 205, 207,
209, 210, 215, 225, 226, 230, 241,
249, 251-7, 260, 262, 269, 279,
288, 293, 315, 335, 364, 369, 379,
394, 405
Submarines, 61, 124, 128, 167, 182-3,
252-3, 260, 266, 363
Submersible transports, 20, 25, 26
Sudan, the, 122, 239, 240, 374, 387,
393
Suez Canal, 62, 237, 370
Summa, 231
Sunnal fiord, 288
Sunday Chronicle, the, 171
Sunday Dispatch, the, 303
Sunday Express, the, 163, 173, 195,
196, 202, 211
Suomussalmi, 231, 232
Supplies. *See* Communications
Supreme War Council, the, 340
Surprise, 19 *et seq.*, 48, 51, 118, 119,
184, 209, 215, 249, 253, 257, 263,
315, 353, 360
Suvla, 254
Sweden, 224, 249 *et seq.*, 260, 261,
269, 276, 294
Swedish iron-fields. *See* Gallivare
Swinton, Colonel (now Major-
General) Sir Ernest, 94
Switzerland, 207
Syria, 237, 243, 374, 385

T

Tactics, 17, 27, 49, 51, 64, 65, 94,
96, 106, 108, 117-19, 121, 157,
231, 360

Tank bridging, 44
Tanks, 32, 33, 35 *et seq.*, 44 *et seq.*,
48, 51, 64, 65, 71, 76, 85, 88, 95,
108, 110, 159, 165, 167, 184, 189,
193, 205, 240, 310 *et seq.*, 321, 337,
340, 345, 350, 361-2
Tanks and aircraft, the combination
of, 34, 37, 41, 44, 75, 114, 117, 189,
320 *et seq.*
Taranto, 382, 393
Territorial Army, the, 46, 103, 110,
121, 122, 123, 177, 324
Time factor, the. *See* Mobility
Times, *The*, 116, 117, 119, 233, 302,
306, 325, 340
Tinker, J. J., 113
Tirlemont, 304
Tobruk, 395
Tongres, 302, 305
Torbay, 366
Total war, 55, 321
Toul, fortress of, 352
Tournai, 330
Tours, 350, 351, 357
Training, 45 *et seq.*, 75, 89, 193, 204
Trans-Caucasia, 241
Trojan war, the, 55
Trondheim, 247, 250, 252, 258, 260
et seq., 271 *et seq.*, 285, 287, 288, 289
et seq.
Trysil Valley, 277
Tynsel, 280
Tytarskari, island of, 220
Tunis, 62, 239
Turin, 372
Turkey, 128, 137, 145, 241, 377, 389

U

U-boats. *See* Submarines
Ukraine, the, 377
Ulsberg, 280, 281, 288
United States, the, 208, 226
United States Army, 104
Utrecht, 306

V

Valdres Valley, 272
Valenciennes, 323
Valera, Baron de, 265
Varro, 375
Verdalsöra, 276
Verne, Jules, 216
Versailles, Treaty of, 213, 217, 406
Vichy, 345

Index

Vimy Ridge, 331
 Vosges, the, 352
 Vuoksi, the river, 231

W

Waal, the, 303, 306
 Waalhaven, 306
 Waremmé, 304
 War Office, the, 171 *et seq.*, 289, 290
Warspite, H.M.S., 256, 257
 Waterloo, battle of, 357
 Wavell, Brigadier (now General) Sir Archibald, 108, 382
 Wavre, 314
 Weapons, 16, 27, 48, 70, 72, 127, 153, 159, 165-8, 183, 184, 188-9, 190, 206, 336-7, 380, 391, 401
 Welles, Sumner, 164
 Wellington, Duke of, 48
 Wells, H. G., 16
 Western Desert, the, 371, 388
 Western Front, the, 193, 260, 299 *et seq.*
 Weygand, General, 319, 326, 331, 344 *et seq.*

Weygand Line, the, 345
 Wilhelmina, Queen, 306
 Williams, Charles, 113
 Winkelman, General, 302, 306, 307
 Wolfe, General, 254
 Wolseley, Lord, 70
 Woolwich, the Royal Military Academy, 46, 47, 51
 World War, 1914-1918, 56, 66, 122, 128

X

Xenophon, 336

Y

Yanina, 380, 391
 Ypres, 331
 Yser, the, 333
 Yugo-Slavia, 380, 381

Z

Zeila, 272
 Zuider Zee, 302